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ABSTRACT

In 1988, only one-half of Philadelphia 9th-graders in comprehensive high schools moved into 10th grade. In the same year, The Pew Charitable Trusts funded the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative (PSC) to seed the restructuring of the city's 22 comprehensive high schools. With a set of programmatic guidelines culled from successful efforts across the country, the Collaborative, in partnership with the school district, initially focused on ninth-graders, the students most vulnerable to failure, and then broadened to include the restructuring of entire schools. How the reforms fared at five high schools is the subject of this report. Data were collected through observation; personal interviews with 111 teachers, 38 students, and 17 administrators; and focus-group discussions with 32 teachers and with 294 students. The report presents case studies of the five high schools, and describes the basic ingredients for school learning communities, for professional development, and for critical reflection. The biggest restructuring dilemma was the segregation of students into tracked programs, which reinforced the attitude that only some students could achieve and that implicitly validated race and class assumptions. Appendices contain information about the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative and suggested research activities. (Contains 21 references). (LMI)

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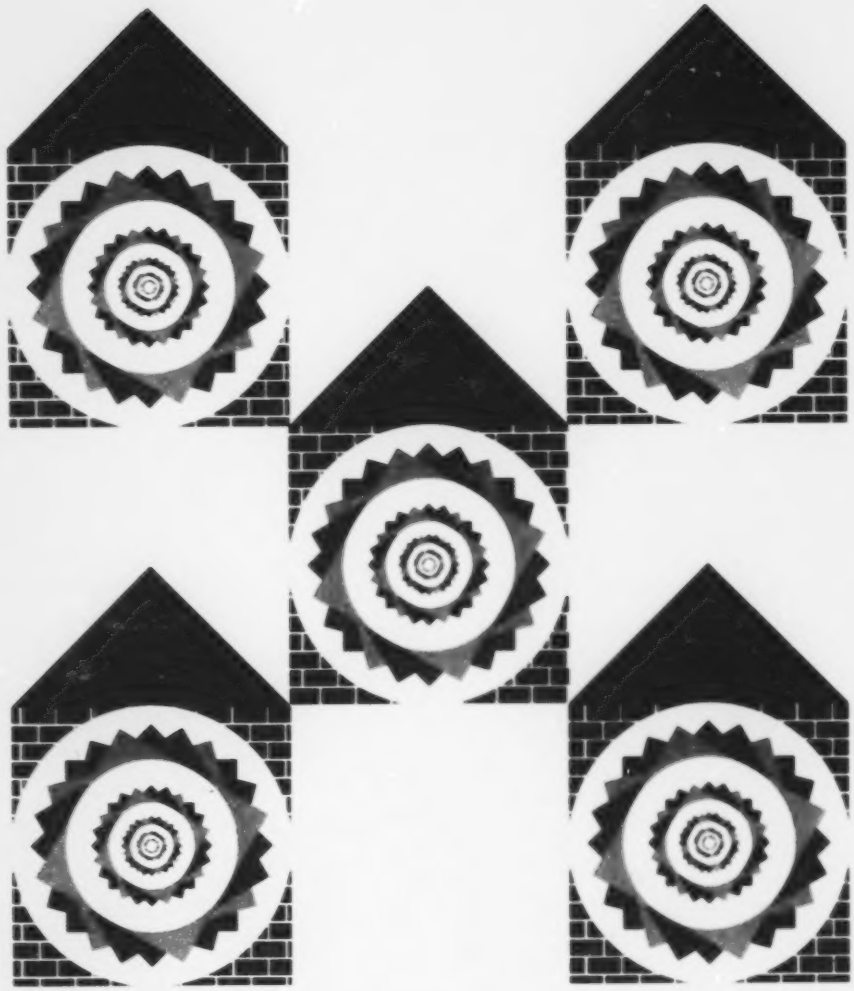

THE FIVE SCHOOL STUDY:

Restructuring Philadelphia's Comprehensive High Schools

Jolley Bruce Christman and Pat Macpherson

Research for Action

1996

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Jolley Bruce Christman and Pat Macpherson

With Jody Cohen, Joan McCreary, and Frances Reimer

A Report

for the

Philadelphia Education Fund

by

Research for Action

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1996

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CHAPTER I

WHAT IS THE REFORM?

In 1988, only half of Philadelphia ninth graders in comprehensive high schools moved into tenth grade; the rest repeated or left school. In the same year, The Pew Charitable Trusts funded the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative (PSC) to seed and nurture the restructuring of the city's 22 comprehensive high schools in an effort to turn the tide of disaffected adolescents pouring from these "neighborhood schools." These comprehensive high schools had long operated within a larger tiered system where special admissions magnets identified and served "achieving" students. Within this context, neighborhood comprehensive high schools, particularly those serving minority populations in poor communities, had become "schools of last resort" representing the bottom tier of Philadelphia public education.

With a set of programmatic guidelines culled from successful efforts across the country (McMullan, Leiderman, and Wolf, 1988), the Collaborative, in partnership with the School District, initially focused on ninth graders, the students most vulnerable to failure. The initiative soon broadened to include the restructuring of entire schools. The Collaborative focused on simultaneously transforming the larger structures of schooling and the daily dynamics of school life—interactions among teachers and students in classrooms. Its reforms represented a systemic effort aimed at all comprehensive high schools, all teachers—those who had previously stepped forward for change and those who hadn't—and all students—regular and special education, Chapter I and ESL students.

The Collaborative's eight-year reform effort (1988-1995) had two principal components: the creation of small learning communities (SLCs) in the comprehensive high schools where intimacy, coherence, and consistency might make good education possible; and school-based management/shared decision-making (SBM/SDM) aimed at moving the locus of decision-making closer to the site of teaching and learning. Professional development for teachers was the primary means for making the major changes in school culture. It aimed to reinvigorate teaching, thereby ratcheting up standards for student achievement. SLCs would be the context for a new accountability framework: shared collegial responsibility for shared students.

How the reforms fared at five schools is the subject of this study. The report begins with students' voices—their diverse experiences in reforming schools—as one entry into assessing the educational potential and impact of restructuring for students. We listen as they tell us about what they want and need from their schools and what they are getting.

We then look at high schools as whole organizations in case studies that outline each school's history with implementing reform. The case studies make visible small learning communities at work—many struggling to survive and secure boundaries, others pressing on to the creation of challenging programs relevant to the lives of all involved. They reveal issues of governance—dilemmas confronted as people explore new ways of participating, leading, representing, and decentralizing within still-standing old organizational arrangements and hierarchies. In the case studies, we see how school history and federal, state, and District policies have powerfully influenced which changes schools will consider and which they dismiss, and how powerfully formative the histories of funded programs can be in setting conditions for school change.

Our appraisal comes at a time when the School District of Philadelphia has launched a new reform era under the leadership of Superintendent David Hornbeck. The District has adopted a ten-point reform plan, *Children Achieving*, that emphasizes student performance standards and accountability of District staff tied to those standards. This ambitious agenda also depends on and extends the reforms undertaken by the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative—the creation of small learning communities and school-based management/shared decision-making. Thus, our assessment at this juncture provides an opportunity to take stock of reform in ways that may help shape the next wave of change.

Student voices tell us what they want and need from their schools.

What is the Reform?

Small learning communities[1] (SLCs) were designed to serve 200-400 heterogeneously grouped students into coherent four year programs within existing buildings. These SLCs, originally called "home-grown charters," chose a pro-

1 In this report we use the term "small learning community" to connote the generic reform strategy of creating small units—schools within schools. The PSC originally called these units "charters," but the term small learning community has now been adopted. In Philadelphia, there are several kinds of small learning communities. Academies refer to long-standing occupationally based programs which serve selected groups of students. Academies have corporate/social service partners and are affiliated through a network. Schools have also developed a variety of magnet programs, which in effect are small learning communities, and like Academies have had admission standards for students. Throughout the report we most often refer to small learning community in the generic sense. Where it seems important to understand context, we identify the specific designation of the small learning community—home-grown charter, Academy, magnet program, etc.

gram theme and planned supports for a stable, supportive and academically challenging community of students with adults for four years. Building on past innovations like the Academies program, SLCs often chose an occupational focus to connect curriculum across disciplines and to the world of work through partnerships with businesses, social service agencies (e.g. Law and Justice, Communications, Health and Fitness, Business, Engineering and Design).

The creation of SLC programs demanded new interactions and resources for faculty. The Collaborative's extensive professional development efforts and negotiations with the District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) aimed at the transformation of schools' organizational cultures. From hierarchical bureaucracies characterized by mandate and compliance, schools moved toward more inclusive decision-making in which administrators, parents, teachers and students could participate in creating, implementing, and monitoring the school vision. Closely connected to this governance reform was the thrust to decentralize the District by making schools and SLCs important sites for resource allocation and decision-making.

During its first six years, the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative provided a variety of supports for schools as they embarked on these two initiatives. (See Appendix A for a listing of programs and resources the Collaborative offered.) The Collaborative engaged organizational consultants who helped to facilitate the early work of interim governance councils; it held summer institutes and school year retreats and year-long seminars in which teachers explored new pedagogy, developed new curriculum, talked about the impact of race, class and gender on adults and students in schools; it seeded Family Group programs, training staff in new dynamics of SLCs; it developed affiliations with national networks like the Coalition of Essential Schools and Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (S.E.E.D.) and funded schools to participate in the work of these networks; it provided grants to small learning communities for planning and SLC activities; it convened cross-school discussions of critical issues; and it commissioned research into restructuring, resulting in *Chartering Urban School Reform*, edited by Michelle Fine, and the ethnographic research of "Growing Smaller" (Christman, Cohen, and Macpherson, 1996), and this "Five School Study."

From mandate and compliance, schools moved toward more inclusive decision-making.

The Philadelphia Schools Collaborative

Essential Principles

Philadelphia charters share a set of common principles. Responsibility for the design of individual school programs rests in the individual charter communities. Diversity, rather than replication, flourishes across the various learning communities.

1. **PURPOSES** The focus of education should be on helping young people learn to use their minds and hands well. Schools should not attempt to be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose. To this end every member of a learning community — educators, students and parents — needs to participate in clarifying the essential skills, areas of knowledge and habits of mind that it believes are central to the students' becoming well-educated members of our society.

2. **ACADEMIC STANDARDS** Teaching and learning is personalized, but the general course of study should be unified and rigorous. While the learning community's goals should apply to all students, the means to these goals will vary as the students themselves vary. High expectations must be held for all. All students, not just some, should be expected to be in a position to grapple with important issues, to be able to participate fully in the larger community as citizens and workers, to have the skills and competencies to hold useful and decently paid employment, to pursue college, and to live satisfying personal lives.

3. **CURRICULUM** Three principles guide our curriculum: 1) that the curriculum should respect the interdisciplinary nature of human activity; 2) that the curriculum should respect the diverse heritages that encompass the society in which our students live and to which they must respond; and 3) that the curriculum be mindful of the concept that "less is more"—that it is better to know well a few important and powerful ideas/topics rather than to cover many superficially; and, 4) that "service learning" can be a strategy for the systemic change of schools.

4. **SIZE AND PERSONALIZATION** In order to educate well, teachers must know the work of their students and their colleagues. To develop a PSC/CES plan requires a community small enough to easily meet and talk together. No charter should have more than 400 students. Learning communities should be organized so that students and adults remain together in considerably smaller communities over several years so they can get to know each other well. Each student should be known well by one faculty member who is responsible for a small cohort of students. The administrators and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first and specialists second, and should expect multiple obligations as teacher-guide-manager with a sense of commitment to their learning community, within the school and beyond.

5. **TEACHING AND LEARNING** Students and staff must be active participants in their own learning. Student and staff as learners, coaches and mentors is an image we endorse. A school should be a living example of communal responsibility. Students, staff and families should have ways to actively contribute to the well-being of their school and the larger community.

6. **ASSESSMENT** Students should be evaluated on the basis of their performance, not hours spent in the classroom. Assessments should be as direct and authentic as possible. Appropriate time must be allocated to permit students to demonstrate skill and concept mastery. Indirect and normative testing should be replaced, as soon and as far as possible, by alternative performance-based assessment methods. Promotion and graduation should be based on demonstrated mastery over clearly stated competencies related to the school's general plan of education.

7. **TONE AND VALUES** Schools should be nurturing and respectful centers of inquiry. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation, mutual trust, and decency—fairness, generosity and tolerance. Students must — in collaboration with their teachers and families—also be active citizens in creating the tone, standards and quality of life of the school.

8. **FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES** Families and communities must have input into school policies, practices and decisions, both as they affect their own children and the school as a total community. The development of mutual respect and trust between the staff and families is a key to the education of students.

9. **DECISION-MAKING** The people who implement policies should have maximum decision-making power and flexibility. Therefore critical decisions need to be school-based, not centrally controlled. The internal life of learning communities must provide the teaching staff with power and responsibility to govern its own practices, control its own budget, select its own teacher/leaders, and participate in all those decisions that affect the success of their students. This must include collaboration between all affected—particularly students and their families.

10. **DIVERSITY** Each school, learning community, charter, and classroom should represent as fully as possible the range of racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds, as well as academic competencies of the community's school children. Learning communities should be gender equitable, accessible across linguistic and cultural groups, and engaged with students across levels of "special needs." Efforts should also be made to build a gender balanced and racially and ethnically mixed staff.

11. **PARTICIPATION** A school community is best served by participants who are voluntarily committed to it. Every effort should be made to insure that neither students nor teachers are forced to become members of a PSC learning community against their wishes. Such choice should not, however, operate as a vehicle for creating inequities or elitism. Schools and charters should assess their strategies for supporting diversity and heterogeneity.

12. **BUDGET** Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include substantial time for collective planning by teachers, and competitive salaries for staff. This will require reexamining how we provide some services in traditional schools. Budgets should be school-based, not centrally controlled.

How was Reform Realized?

Improvement in student passing and attendance rates in early SLCs encouraged the School District to expand this reform. In the winter of 1993, the District mandated that by September, 1995, all comprehensive high schools would be fully "charterized," i.e. all students and teachers would be assigned to a small learning community. The Office for Senior High Schools established an incentive strategy to encourage the creation of small learning communities as well as a procedure for auditing teacher and student assignments to SLCs. In the spring of 1995, the Center for Assessment and Policy Development (CAPD) reported that the enrollment of students in SLCs had increased across all grades.

> In the 1991-92 school year, about 34 percent of all comprehensive high school students were enrolled in school-within-a-school initiatives ... By February 1995, these figures had increased to approximately 75 percent of all students attending comprehensive high school (McMullan, Sipe, and Wolf, 1995, p.8).

However, CAPD also reported that passing rates had gone down as schools became fully charterized:

> In general, rates of course passing peaked in the 1990-91 or 1991-92 school years and have receded through the 1993-94 year to levels slightly higher or about the same as the passing rates initially observed in the baseline year of 1988-89. This pattern is consistent across all grade levels and disciplines (McMullan, Sipe, and Wolf, 1995, p.5).

"You had the Collaborative saying 'Do it!', the District saying 'What're you doing?', and the union highly skeptical about reform."

Why did passing rates peak in the initial years of SLCs and then recede? "The Five School Study" offers evidence and analysis of reform structures half-built and unevenly supported. It reveals the heavy human toll of promising ideas given brief and insufficient growing conditions for real change. Accompanying the increased numbers of SLCs was a devastating decrease in resources and leadership for the labor-intensive work of reform inside schools. As one principal put it, "You had the Collaborative saying 'Do it!', the District saying 'What're you doing?', and the union highly skeptical about reform."

Changes in leadership at the District and the Collaborative, and the PFT's primary concerns for protecting building seniority seriously limited or undermined

crucial supports for reform. There were three Philadelphia Superintendents and four Assistant Superintendents for High Schools during the reform period. What do these changes in leadership signify about the District's commitment to and direction for high school restructuring? In 1993, the founding leaders of the Collaborative resigned, in protest over district and union intractability regarding clear support for school-based management/shared decision-making and small learning communities. In 1994-95 the Collaborative began discussions with PATHS/PRISM for a merger that lead to the creation of the Philadelphia Education Fund (PEF), and that planning process consumed organizational attention. These gaps in leadership and organizational turmoil created a climate of uncertainty throughout the District and impeded the ability of central office and the Collaborative to support school level reform.

Partner relations among Collaborative, District, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) strained as policies and politics collided. The District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers had reached agreement on a school-based management/shared decision-making initiative in June, 1990. This agreement established a formal process for schools to pursue participatory governance structures and decentralized management. After submitting a Letter of Intent to the District's Joint Committee on Restructuring, schools would establish an interim governance council. Interim councils were charged with the development of an educational plan which would lay out a mission and implementation design and request any waivers from District, union, and state regulations they believed necessary for effective implementation. Upon approval by 75 percent of the school's staff, the Educational Plan would move to the Joint Committee for review.

In the spring of 1993, confronting a fiscal crisis, the District required schools to make difficult budget decisions which, in many cases, involved cutting positions. It suggested that governance councils and school leadership teams make these decisions consensually. The PFT urged its membership not to participate in these deliberations. Several interim governance councils disbanded over the stalemate. In June, 1993 the Collaborative reported that although it had provided technical assistance and flexible funding to promote SBM/SDM in comprehensive high schools, only two had reached the SBM stage of development, while four had withdrawn. The initiative stalled there. Currently it sits—the unacknowledged elephant in the living room—waiting for recognition, reflection, and renegotiated revision.

At about the same time, the Collaborative proposed that the small learning community be the decision-making unit for budget allocation, personnel assignment, etc. Again, the PFT saw this move as one which would jeopardize long-standing contract provisions like building seniority. The Collaborative's vision and implementation of reform at schools encountered such limits and challenges from the District and union before even "arriving" ready for a day's work in schools.

The achievements of Collaborative reform at these five schools become all the more powerful and dramatic in this demoralizing political context. "The Five School Study" documents SLCs' increasing sturdiness and how necessary they have become within the tough environments of urban lives and bureaucratic demands. They work! In an earlier analysis we highlighted growth factors within the first three years of home-grown charters (Christman, Cohen, and Macpherson, 1996). We downplayed the overwhelming odds against the growth of SLCs, the raw power battles between union and district, the inequities that created bitter histories inside schools, the policy barricades, the racial mistrust, class and gender conflicts and deals, the unintended consequences, and the fragilities of reform initiatives.

We tell enough of these schools' stories now to restart conversations about the conditions for change—many of which are conditions and decisions made *outside* schools. Much of what goes on inside schools is largely attributable to things that are happening outside school walls: funding cutbacks and policy mandates, union/district contract negotiations, supports for reform initiatives, law suits, and court mandates.

Many of the conditions for change are conditions and decisions made *outside* schools.

What was the Process of "The Five School Study?"

Beginning in 1991 six ethnographers (four of whom worked on the study reported here) became participant observers in newly formed charters in four high schools to document their creation. During the course of that work it became increasingly clear to us that in order to understand what was happening in charters we needed to expand the boundaries of our exploration to look at how whole schools were moving into these smaller units, how they were managing the tensions of autonomy and interdependence among small learning communities "living under the same roof" (Farmbry, 1994).

In the spring of 1994, Collaborative staff, looking toward the completion of the Pew grant, invited us to plan a qualitative study that would provide "thick de-

scription" of what was happening in schools in order to understand what had been accomplished in the six years of high school restructuring, and to plan the work that needs to continue, expand and deepen. We proposed that the study focus on the central initiatives of high school reform, the creation of small learning communities, and the movement to site-based management and shared decision-making. These were our questions:

- How are schools reinventing teaching and learning so that all students have access to an intellectually rigorous and engaging education? How have the reform initiatives—decentralization, shared decision-making, and small learning communities—supported the transformation of teaching and learning?

- How are schools moving towards shared governance that makes parents, students, administrators, teachers, and community members into active participants in the creation of school mission and implementation of mission?

- How are schools becoming communities that critically examine what they are doing and why they are doing it in order to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all students?

The study used qualitative research methods to illuminate what has happened in high schools during this restructuring era—what has changed and what these changes mean to a variety of stakeholders—educators, parents, students, and community members. Anthropologists and sociologists have traditionally employed the methods of qualitative research—interviewing, participant observation, and document analysis—to examine people's daily lives. Qualitative researchers observe, participate, and ask questions in a setting in order to make visible the taken-for-granted details of daily life. This approach is helpful for understanding educational reform because it reveals the contextual factors that shape what change looks like as well as the values, attitudes, and beliefs that underlie how people relate to one another. Qualitative research also takes a holistic approach to understanding what is happening, and therefore captures broad patterns in school culture. In this study, it was a potent tool for revealing essential dilemmas that all the schools confronted but managed differently.

The researchers were instructed by the focus and concerns of each school's reform leaders.

In the fall of 1994 we worked with Collaborative staff to choose a sample of schools with important differences of size, student composition, and reform history. We looked for small and large high schools: one of the schools is just un-

der 1,000 and one slightly over, one has 1,600 students, one has 2,000, and one 2,600. Student population in terms of race/ethnicity and socio-economic status was also important. Two of the schools are racially isolated: one is predominantly African American with some Euro American and Asian Americans; a fourth school is composed of almost equal numbers of African Americans, Euro Americans, and Asian Americans; a fifth is a school that is located in a Euro American neighborhood and serves almost equal numbers of white neighborhood students and black students from across the city who attend as part of desegregation efforts. It also became clear that schools had entered restructuring with different levels of intensity and at different moments in the past six years and so we chose schools that were "old hands" at small learning communities and those that had begun charterization and other restructuring efforts more recently.

Central to our research approach was a team of 14 fieldworkers, racially and ethnically diverse, who also represented a range of identities along the continuum of school district "insider" and "outsider." The team included three Philadelphia high school teachers and a staff researcher at the Philadelphia Education Fund in addition to Research for Action staff. The team composition represents Research for Action's commitment to research that builds knowledge *with* those who work and live in schools as a way to gain their perspectives on what is happening and to support the development of their organizations' capacity to collect data and look at it critically.

We began to shape this research by asking about 20 teachers and principals in the five schools what they thought was important to learn in a study of Philadelphia high school restructuring. At a dinner meeting in November, 1994, this group came with two sets of questions for research into their schools' reform histories. The first were "cross site" issues for a comprehensive understanding of central stages and dilemmas of restructuring. The second set of questions raised site-specific issues identified by each school's leadership team. The researchers assigned to each school were thus introduced to and instructed by the focus and concerns of each school's reform leaders.

The first round of fieldwork began in December and continued through the beginning of February. Teams of three or four researchers were on site at each of the five schools for four or five days during this round of research. Their first task was to construct a map of people, places, programs, and events across the school. This map served as a guide for decisions about whom to interview, where to observe, and what kinds of documents to review. Teams cast this initial net

broadly, in order to get a feel for the school as a whole, to gain insight about ingredients critical to the school's culture and its reform initiatives. At a mid-course analytical meeting, researchers came together across sites to discuss issues and contexts. We looked for common themes and dilemmas and used these to more closely focus our second round of research in March and April.

In all, we interviewed 111 teachers in individual interviews and an additional 32 in focus groups. Seventeen administrators were also interviewed. We listened to 294 students in focus groups and conducted 38 individual interviews with students as well. We shadowed 22 students and observed 121 classrooms. We attended more than 30 meetings, including meetings of SLCs, school cabinets, community members and parents, Building Committees, Home and School Association, assemblies, and professional development groups.

Reflecting on the Research

We worked with our liaison groups in the five schools throughout the research process. In several schools we provided interim informal feedback. In all schools we asked liaisons to help us make sense of what we were seeing and hearing. In June, after the completion of the fieldwork, researchers invited school liaison teams to a dinner meeting. There we provided oral feedback on preliminary cross-site findings and reflections on the research. We gathered school insiders' interpretations of preliminary findings. We also met with individual school teams to offer them more detailed feedback on issues salient to their sites.

Homegrown research supports "the hardest work of reform—thinking through how school is working ... for every student."

School people appreciated the time to listen, discuss, and reflect on their school's data with each other and knowledgeable outsiders. While encouraged by the candor of their colleagues' responses to interview questions and by their hopefulness, school participants worried about perceived silences around difficult issues like race, standards and accountability, and competition for scarce resources. They also wondered about how future research might support small learning communities as they engage in what a teacher calls "the hardest work of reform—thinking through how school is working and not working for *every* student."

We offer this report to Philadelphia educators and citizens as material for discussion and further reflection and planning. It is our hope that it will contribute to continued efforts to make schools important sites for adult and student learning.

CHAPTER II

STUDENTS ASSESS REFORM

Do we trust students to tell us about school reform? About what needs reform in their education? Their knowledge is, after all, the final business of reform. As schools' primary beneficiaries, students are well positioned to reflect on the changes that accompany efforts to restructure their schools. If reform is designed to offer a richer, more effective education more consistently to more students, how do students experience their reforming classes, support services and SLC programs? Further, asking students about reform, at least potentially, positions them to be more active participants in the reform process.

This chapter offers a collection of student voices and experiences *as material for reflection* about reform's history and future. It reports students' talk about themselves, their peers, teachers, classes, SLCs, and schools.[2] It also presents our observations of them as they attended classes, ate lunch, travelled school hallways, talked in Family Groups. Our attempt is to make visible and to understand the diversity of students' perceptions of and experiences in small learning communities in order to assess the educational potential of these settings for students.

Over the course of the year, we interviewed more than three hundred students individually and in focus groups and "shadowed" twenty-two students through their school days, attending more than one hundred and twenty classes. Some news was good. We found places where young people were engaged and challenged by their classes, supported and sustained by their small learning communities and were rethinking their own investment in school as they engaged with adults in considering their responsibility for their own learning and one another. Such students spoke about taking up opportunities "to do" instead of just sitting in classrooms as passive, often resistant learners.

In more places we found the impact of reform preliminary. There we witnessed early moments in community building as students and teachers were getting to know each other in different ways. But the majority of students were disaffected by uninspired classes, insecure in buildings that were noisy and dilapidated, and offended by teachers who "don't teach" and by school policies that punish or humiliate them. Quick to identify what they perceive to be good teaching, they talked freely about teachers who "teach" and those who "don't teach," about

2 Quotes in Chapter II are by students unless otherwise noted.

those who have time for students and those who "don't want to get involved," about teachers who "have control" over classes, and those whose classes are ruled by unruly students who "don't want to learn."

For students, good teaching involves good relationships. Students want to be known and be heard, to gain direction, to be engaged in their own education and to make meaningful connections with teachers and other students. Only some students have found these things in their small learning communities. All students are concerned and often doubtful about whether their education is "good enough" for their success in college or job. Is some– -or most—of their time "wasted" in school?

The students' "hot issues" are primarily about teaching and learning relationships and about their investment in their work. These issues are not unique to Philadelphia students; they are consonant with findings about students' experiences in schools across the United States (Newmann, 1992; Noddings, 1992; Poplin and Weeres, 1992). Overall, students recognize and value relationships with teachers and other students that result in meaningful academic work. They know that boredom and alienation are signs that education is not working. They want higher standards of evaluation for mastering of material so that passing means more than attendance, and more than rote learning. Their reflections on their school experience cluster around four themes:

Students identify teachers who "teach" and those who "don't teach."

1. *Teaching and Learning Relationships:* How do students describe instances when teachers show that they "care" and "respect" them? When do they perceive teachers distancing, ignoring or even disdaining their needs?

2. *Connection to Community*: When do students feel connected to a group? When do they feel safe, attended to, known by, and knowledgeable about others in their classes and small learning communities? How do they work together?

3. *Investment in School Work*: Under what circumstances do students invest in the work of a course, program or project? How do they understand and commit to the value of their school work? When do they feel disengaged and bored, ignorant or skeptical about the purpose or relevance of the work? How active is learning, and what kinds of teaching promote student learning?

4. *Standards for Student Work*: Are standards for passing and assessments for grades meaningful and valuable for students? Are standards "too low" or "too easy" so that good grades and passing are not respected?

Teaching and Learning Relationships

From the perspectives of students, the current crisis in education has much to do with poor relationships in schools. The most common complaints were about passivity and the lack of meaningful work produced from such poor relations:

> I have an information processing class and it's the same thing as a typing class. I mean we have a typing class and you're just using the computer to sit there and look at a paper and type it out. It's the same thing. She [the teacher] just gives you a paper and you just type all day. It's not supposed to be like that. Sometimes I try to read a paper and I just don't understand. I ask her and she says 'Go read the paper.'

Another common complaint was about teachers' lack of respect for students.

> They act like they're too good for you.
>
> They make you feel like you're getting on their nerves.
>
> They talk down to you. We're seniors, they treat us like freshmen.

For students, good teaching involves good relationships.

These students protest that contempt is the lesson from some teachers. From other teachers, it's indifference.

> **Student Focus Group**
> *Researcher:* Why are students absent?
> *Student 1:* If they [students] feel like teachers don't really care, they don't bother ... A lotta teachers care—some—most [teachers] not a lot.
> *Researcher:* How can you tell teachers care?
> *Student 1:* They ask where you've been.
> *Student 2:* They get on you about your grades, keep bringing your grades up, cause they care about your

> passing. They don't want to see you back in their class again [failing].

These comments reveal how powerfully students' perceptions of teachers' attitudes frame student initiative and investment and valuing of the work. While some students gave examples of teachers disdainful of them, most students saw the majority of their teachers as disengaged from student concerns, questions, and needs. Significantly, when students described teachers who listen and respond helpfully, they assumed the value of the work. Distant or dismissive teachers made the work seem less important to do. Students most often described "caring" teachers as "stayin' on top of us, seein' we do the work." According to them, teachers who care expect a lot and hold them accountable for producing work of which they are capable.

> Some of these teachers here are willing to help you if you're willing to help yourself. Some of them know what you can do that will help you. Some of them just don't care, and it's on you. Like me, I need somebody to push me, just to say, 'You gotta do this.' I have to have that attention. It's important.

> Some of our teachers are more stricter. They teach you responsibility. They tell you they care about you, yeah. But then they tell you, 'You gotta get your act together.' And that helps.

"If [students] feel like teachers don't really care, they don't bother ..."

These two students described caring teachers as guides, who see and point out to students when they can do better work, how they can challenge themselves. At the same time, they acknowledged the reciprocity inherent in constructive teacher/student relationships: teachers also need to see students taking responsibility for themselves—setting goals and following through.

Student Focus Group

Researcher: What kinds of things help you learn?

Student 1: I like English best. She makes you read. Then you talk it out; then you see the video. I like that. She prepares you for college. She gives you plenty of work ... She cares about the students.

Student 2: Mr. P., he's a wise crack. He's always making comments. He's always on you. He stays on your behind.

Student 3: There are different teachers that is on you, but if a teacher is on you too, too much, you don't get it.

How do student/teacher relationships change?

What do changes in relationships look like in classrooms? How do teachers and students move toward reciprocal relationships in which teachers are helpers and guides and students are productive workers? The following example shows three perspectives of changing teaching and learning relationships. First a teacher reflects on her evolving pedagogy, her expectations for students, and the work of her SLC; second we observe her and her students at work in the classroom; finally, a student reflects on teachers in this SLC. The teacher explains that cooperative learning must begin with building respectful relationships within which learning takes place.

From a Researcher's Fieldnotes

Stephanie Clayton, Math Teacher, Health SLC: I take seriously 'teacher as coach, student as worker' (one of the Nine Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools). I want students to be independent learners. To have the essentials of Algebra I so they can go on and take Geometry and Algebra II. I want them to go to college. I get frustrated because they can't work as independently as I want. They're so unused to learning on their own. They'll work cooperatively as long as everyone knows what they're doing. The high learner doesn't want to help the low learner. I don't use real cooperative learning ...

[In our small learning community] we're working on tone and decency ... the affective part of education ... I realize that we're not social workers and we have to teach them ... but at least to be aware of [what is happening in their lives].

Stephanie Clayton's Classroom: Fourteen girls and one boy sit in self-chosen groups of two, three, and four at tables working together on worksheets to graph algebraic equations. The classroom is organized as a "self-teaching model." Students have "packets" of materials and assignments. First there is a teaching example and then the assigned problems. On the

board is today's assignment: "Finish Coordinate Geometry and then do review pages 1-2." There is also a "help list" and, throughout class, students sign their names to the list so that Ms. Clayton, who spends most of the class period circulating around the room, will stop at their table to help them individually. She works with one student, making certain that she can move through the problem before she goes to the next.

A student in the Health SLC reflects on Ms. Clayton's class and the SLC: In this charter the teachers stay on top of you and know how you're doing.

These slices of classroom and SLC life show education on the road of possibility. Ms. Clayton has participated in many kinds of professional development with her SLC colleagues and in teacher networks sponsored by the Collaborative. She is a teacher practiced in reflection and uses the research interview to review changes in her teaching practice and assess how they mesh with her students' needs and abilities. She has adopted new ideas but expresses frustration when some strategies fall short of her hopes. But other techniques like the "help list" are a good match for students' desire for one-on-one teaching. With her SLC colleagues, Ms. Clayton is exploring how to influence students' values and behaviors. This adult concern is felt and appreciated by students. Over time, it may support the kind of climate conducive for cooperative learning.

Connection to Community

Learning takes place within respectful relationships.

There was a wide range of experiences with small learning communities among the students we met. For some, their SLC was an "empty shell" with as little meaning as the old Advisory 101. For the majority, their SLC's name was a promise that was only partially "real." Most of their courses and teachers went on unchanged, and so did the students' segregated and alienated experience of high school. For a minority of other students, SLCs offered real connection and caring, and students recognized this as essential to their school success. These students argued that when real relationships are nurtured in SLCs, school climate gets warmer and safer and metal detectors and locker searches are less necessary.

SLCs that work provide support and consistent relationships that gain strength over time. These connections keep students in school.

> By having a charter you get more attention and things get done faster. If we were all together there would be no way they could take the time for us like that. I think the school would be in an uproar. There would be no way to control the whole school like that. I'm glad that the whole school is divided up ... You get more attention that way.

Students' perceptions of SLCs change over time. Often in the beginning, students bristled at SLC boundaries of space and roster. They were critical of what they perceived to be constraints—staying in one section of a building, seeing the same teachers and students over and over again. These complaints recede when students and adults form relationships that students compared to "family."

> I think the whole idea is good. At first we were upset, but then we got to like it.

> In charters, you get to know your teachers better and you make friends. It's more like family. The ninth graders will have a better chance [because they will have been in a charter for four years.]

> It's like a family in our charter, everybody knows everybody.

Often in the beginning, students bristled at SLC boundaries of space and roster.

Students who were able to see and work with the same teachers over time recognized a benefit:

> If you have the same teacher over several years, you get to learn their style and what they expect. You don't have to keep catching on to how they teach.

Perhaps the most important impact of small learning communities was articulated by a student in a school that has nurtured SLCs over the past several years.

> It helps you come to school everyday.

Given their smallness and consistency, students saw SLCs as families where they "build special friendships" and were able to develop close relationships with teachers. Students identified a number of factors that strengthened community in their SLCs. SLC coordinators were often key supports to students, serving as mentors and important role models to young people.

> Our charter, because it is so small, we like real close, like a family. Mr. D. is like a father to us. If you have any problems he is there for us. If you need anything, he is there to give to you.
>
> My mom is a dispatcher and she's never home. She's not home and I don't have anyone to talk to. And my father is an electrician and he's always busy. I stay here 'til about 6 and talk to Mrs. B. She's not going to turn us away from anything. She'd rather see what's wrong with us before she takes care of her business.
>
> Mrs. S. is like a mother. She understands a person. She pays attention to what you have to say.

Frequently, the new role of SLC coordinator has enabled teachers with a special talent for dealing with adolescents to serve as mentor, buffer, mediator, cheerleader for SLC students. Able to know all the SLC's students, coordinators can marshal and direct appropriate resources and supports to students who need them.

> **From a Researcher's Fieldnotes**
> Andrea [SLC Coordinator] is amazing with kids. I've never seen anyone have the kind of calming impact she does on the most disruptive students. It's awesome.

Like SLC coordinators, counselors and social work interns, when assigned to SLCs, help to put in place safety nets for individual students who they come to know well, thus creating an overall climate of a caring community.

In many places, the SLC office was a hub of activity—a gathering place for teachers and students looking for recognition, direction, and support.

The SLC office was a hub of activity—a gathering place for teachers and students looking for recognition, direction, and support.

> **From a Researcher's Fieldnotes**
> *Urban Studies Charter Office, 9:00 a.m.*: As has been the case every time I have stopped by the SLC office, Ms. P. has many students who need her help. Today there was a young man at the table waiting for his roster; this was his first day back in school after serving 13 months at [disciplinary school] for selling drugs. Ms. P. went over the terms of his probation,

reinforcing consequences. There was a young woman who needed a hall pass. An officer from the Department of Health and Human Services entered the office for help in locating a student. When Ms. P. didn't recognize the name she checked the charter's roster of students. The girl had come to school only once or twice. Ms. P. and I had no time to talk.

Urban Studies Charter Office, 2:00 p.m.: The office was full of students and I sat while Ms. P. attended to a variety of needs. One young woman was there with her new baby and a friend who was pregnant. They had just come from a parenting class. Another student wanted to transfer out of the technical program he is in. Ms. P. explained that even though the location is not familiar and travel is hard, if he leaves he will be losing the work he has put in. Does he want to jeopardize this effort? As she moves from one student to the next, Ms. P. puts a lot of emphasis on the way students get her attention, insisting that they wait and say "excuse me," "please," "thank you," when appropriate. Just as we finally begin our interview, a female student limps into the office. Ms. P. takes time to supervise this mainstreamed special education student's office work.

Community is not a commodity to be delivered by adults *to* students.

But community is not a commodity to be delivered by adults *to* students. Students must become invested in small learning communities. Teachers pointed out the connection between relationally oriented, caring teachers and responsible behavior from students:

> When we first started everyone thought we had the worst kids. Now they think we have the best because we have fewer fights and discipline problems. The teachers in this charter believe in strong relationships. (Teacher)

In some SLCs, students were beginning to see results when everybody had an active role in the construction of new community:

> It's a family feeling. Everybody has certain jobs to perform.

Family Group and Peer Mentoring emerged as particularly powerful supports for students and, just as importantly, as *catalysts for community building* in SLCs.

Both have provided settings where students can speak and listen to each other. They are often the only spaces in schools where students can raise issues and talk with each other in safety. Seniors described the benefits of mentoring ninth graders:

> We learned respect when we got to know each other. Everyone has their own little cliques, but this threw us all together. You got a chance to form an opinion and speak your opinion. Like in classes you never get a chance to talk about it. It's a chance to express feelings about the way the school runs. It can help. It's important too. Freshmen don't really know, we make them comfortable, they learn different skills.

In this student's assessment, students are active shapers of community and active teachers of their peers. Students deliberate, form and express opinions, and problem solve. Below, another student rostered into a self-described "good Family Group," in a school-wide Family Group program, argued that her group's activities connect students to life outside school and to fellow students. Again, students learn community responsibility as they think about what they owe one another, and in this case, confidentiality.

> We talk about what goes on in the world. [Any] problems we keep it amongst ourselves, so that once we leave it's not going outside the room. I think it's good. Some of them [the students] don't have anyone to talk to at home. They get to express how they feel and don't have to worry about somebody putting them down.

Family Group and Peer Mentoring were *catalysts for community building* in SLCs.

When students described their experiences in Family Group and Peer Mentoring, they emphasized the significance of "talking about it." These settings provided opportunities for substantive, authentic conversation, which Newmann (1994) identifies as foundational to learning. Students also recognized the power of real talk to make them feel part of something.

Likewise, Family Group and Peer Mentoring have challenged adults to rethink their roles vis à vis students. In the following, we hear a teacher reflect on how Family Group transformed her sense of her obligation to tell into an obligation to listen, learn, and find common ground.

> **From a Researcher's Fieldnotes**
> A teacher describes how Family Group has changed her. She

described herself as "opinionated and assertive." She says her facial expressions always reveal how she feels. But her students have taught her "not to be so quick to judge ... I want to hear what they have to say." She used as an example her response to teen pregnancy. One of the girls in her Family Group became pregnant and the other girls wanted a shower to celebrate. She did not want to celebrate. She and they have reached a compromise where they will "acknowledge" the pregnancy, not ignore it, but not celebrate it either.

In urban schools, differences in race and class distance teachers and students. Locked into roles that reinforce low expectations for connection, engagement, respect, and learning, adults and young people live parallel lives in school. Adult "acknowledgements" of students and their experiences are at the core of transformed education. One teacher offers this simple explanation of how Family Group transforms teaching and learning: "When you know a particular child, you can teach him."

Investment in School Work

Focus Group Interview
Researcher: Tell me about your classes.
Student 1: We don't do nothing.
Student 2: I just want these teachers to teach.

"When you know a particular child, you can teach him."

Students hoped for SLCs and classrooms where they could build friendships and develop close relationships with teachers. Such trust and intimacy are necessary, but not sufficient for good teaching and learning. Students do not equate friendliness with effective education. "Teachers who don't teach" is the most damning and pervasive student critique of school. But how do students define teaching? And what is their responsibility to engage in what is going on in the classroom? Shadowing Aisha through her school day, one sees both sides: from teachers' perspectives, "kids who don't care about learning;" from students' perspectives, "teachers who don't teach."

From a Researcher's Fieldnotes
First Period, Media: The communications lab is a large room with computers, video equipment, an art corner. Students mill about in various groups. Throughout the period some work on computers; one is preparing a silk screen for a T-shirt;

several view video resumes they have created; another girl works on the newsletter. Many appear to do no work, chatting with friends throughout the class. Aisha is one of these. She tells me that she doesn't get a clear sense of direction from the teacher.

Second Period, Physics: Eighteen students sit at five nonfunctioning lab tables. The teacher stands at the board writing notes from the textbook. She spends all but the last 10 minutes of class writing on the board with her back to the room. She takes two breaks to read to herself out of the textbook. She interacts with students three times after telling them to copy the notes: once to ask the room to be quiet; once to answer a student's question about her handwriting; the last to intervene when one student persistently complains about another. Aisha tells me this isn't an unusual class.

In Media, the teacher has set up activities that engage some students who are prepared to follow through on self-directed projects. Others, like Aisha, remain on the sidelines of learning. *What does it take to get them in the game?* In Physics, there appears to be neither teacher nor student investment in learning. *Whose responsibility is this classroom?*

Most students understood well what it takes for them to learn, what teachers need to do to help them.

> Other teachers just give work. Here [in this small learning community] they make sure you understand it.
>
> They [teachers] can make it fun to learn, not just stand there and teach us.

"He will let you make mistakes, even on the board, and keep asking students if they agree or not."

In describing a math teacher they deemed particularly effective, students explained, "He will let you make mistakes, even on the board, and keep asking students if they agree or not." Central to this description is students working through to solve the problems with a teacher on the sideline guiding their explorations and struggles.

Students also recognize what helps them engage in work. For example, they had this advice for one teacher:

> He needs to break it down like other teachers so we can really get it. Otherwise it's boring. Like he just give us this [reading]. He needs to prepare us for it, tell us what we're doing.

"Break it down" was a phrase we heard on numerous occasions. Students drew this metaphor from jazz where "breaking it down" means to reveal essential structures, the concepts or organizing principles behind the notes. Good teachers help students find and make meaning, guiding their encounters with major concepts. In their classrooms, students want to "do" and want teachers to "break it down," allow students to try, make mistakes, and teach each other.

At one school, students described Dan Holman's ninth grade class as "different than other math classes, better. Usually you just sit and listen but here you do." The following scene is from his classroom:

> **From a Researcher's Fieldnotes**
> Most of the students in the class are African American, a few are Latino, two are European American. They sit at tables, in groups of four, in a room with walls plastered with classroom codes, African American history posters, math game rules, and an abundance of math problems solved by students on large pieces of flip chart paper. Mr. Holman is active in teacher professional networks, and bases this math course on an Interactive Math Program (IMP) used in pockets throughout the city. The course makes math meaningful and accessible by relating problems to students' lives. Focusing today's lesson on "One-on-One," a probabilities problem framed in basketball terms, Mr. Holman takes a basketball from the closet and dribbles it around the classroom as he poses problems. "Player makes shot. What happens? Rebound. Another shot? How many points? Here's how Andre shoots." The students are excited by the teacher's dribbling; he makes them feel it's not stupid to care about the one-on-one situations he's acting out. They follow his banter, laughing and addressing his questions using their knowledge of basketball. The boys are especially vocal.
>
> Group work follows, constructed around the question "How many points are made over 20 tries of one-on-one?" Drawing different colored cubes from envelopes Mr. Holman has

distributed to each group, the students complete and record 20 one-on-one attempts. They quickly become engaged in the activity. Their hands shoot up throughout the group work, and Mr. Holman can't get to all of them fast enough.

Mr. Holman engages students and encourages them to be active participants in their own learning. He has created a classroom context that attended to student interests, encouraged community, and was lively and inviting. Students said about such teachers, "They trust us, they give us more freedom to work on our own."

Over and over, students told us they relished opportunities for conversation. For students, talk was essential to learning, and conversation part of engagement. Yet we saw few classrooms where teachers opened the floor to dialogue.

> Ms. J., she incorporates conversation into learning. In other classes all the teachers say is 'Open your books. Sit and read.' They're afraid of conversation.
>
> Other schools give information, then you spit it back out. Here there is more discussion. You can speak your mind.

Students also named settings other than classrooms where talk is valued and invited. Family Group and Peer Mentoring become unexpected sites for curriculum:

"Usually you just sit and listen but here you do."

> **From a Researcher's Fieldnotes**
> *Researcher*: Where [in school] do you think you're learning?
> *Student*: Peer mentoring. You're not supposed to be learning something, but I've been learning A LOT. About people.

Julia Keaton's eleventh and twelfth grade Social Science class was a place where students told us their voices were heard and their opinions valued.

> **From a Researcher's Fieldnotes**
> Twenty students are seated in a large circle, and after they discuss and negotiate a rubric for the evaluation of their

notebooks with Ms. Keaton, they read "Will you be a witness or an agent of change?" by Marian Wright Edelman. Ms. Keaton structures the reading as a Circle of Knowledge; students read the article, highlight passages most important to them, and then read the marked passages aloud, identifying their significance. Going around the circle, students report, one by one, each giving a reason for highlighting a particular passage.

"It's important to me because I'm scared for myself and my friends and family."

"Kids see people beat up people for nothing, a few dollars. They need to be taught better than that."

"We do bring out violence but it's all in the way people think. Lots of my friends are messed up because of drugs."

The students listen to each other attentively, often nodding or responding to the speaker with other nonverbal cues. Later they talk about the unique nature of Ms. Keaton's class, where they discuss real issues that are important to them—stereotyping, difference, race, racism, and violence. They describe the climate as one of common concern, as "family" where they deal with their differences early on and now accept and are interested in each other.

Ms. Keaton, a member of the Re:Learning Faculty and an SLC that is an exploratory Coalition of Essential Schools school, works hard to help students "make connections" and become "better readers and writers and thinkers." She explained, "Students love it [Socratic Seminar]. They have a chance to express their point of view and hear their classmates on topics they don't usually talk about." In Ms. Keaton's classes, students listen to and learn from each other. A Teacher Consultant in the Philadelphia Writing Project, Ms. Keaton designs writing tasks which build on students' talk and challenge them to think critically about the world around them.

In planning SLCs, teachers have used outside partnerships to build connections for students to the world of work. Many of the new home-grown charters are occupationally based: Law and Justice, Communications, Health and Fitness,

Business, Engineering and Design, etc. Teachers want their students to gain work experience so that "they'll see they need to know things to get a job," and they seek out institutional partners like hospitals and universities "so that kids in the neighborhood could participate ... and get real jobs and have real careers." They also want to provide students with experiences that connect them to the world outside their neighborhoods and, in the early years of home-grown charters, SLCs frequently designated much of their charter-based funds for trips and cultural events. But what do students think about how theme-focused SLCs are preparing them for the future world of work and citizenship? What knowledge do they think they will need to navigate the years ahead?

Students voiced a range of perceptions and evaluations of their SLCs' connections to the larger world of work. Some identified specific ways SLCs further their career plans. It "gets me jobs," is how one student described her new business oriented SLC. Ninth and tenth grade students in a health-related SLC talked of the opportunity to "take jobs for credit" in veterinary hospitals and dental offices. "They help you find a job in your area of interest as a career." One student in an SLC that meshed intern placements with community building efforts like Peer Mentoring and Family Group voiced the strongest affirmation of small learning communities and their potential for connecting students' present with their futures.

> Charters is like a whole different thing. It prepares you for a whole different thing. It gets you ready for the real world. It makes you more dependable; [it] makes you more ready.

"Charters ... [get] you ready for the real world."

Students in several other SLCs told us about participating in summer programs at local colleges. They described these experiences as "eye opening," affording a glimpse of possible futures they hadn't seen before. One student marked her "turn-around:"

> In ninth and tenth grade I was just coming to school to pass. It was after I was in a special [SLC related] program over the summer at Villanova that I became more focused. You got to see how open and free college really was. You were really going to do a lot on your own.

Another also appreciated exploring her options,

> We visit colleges ... learn about possibilities, and what to expect from college.

But it takes resources—human and financial—to establish new, distinctive educational programs. Many students pointed to discrepancies between their expectations and what their SLCs have thus far delivered. They questioned the benefit of career-related charters that lacked essential resources and coursework for gaining the academic foundation necessary for the career:

> I was told that charters was to get students prepared, to put them in small communities to learn different trades that when they leave they can have a better chance at getting a job. But in this charter ... they don't teach you a trade to get you a job ... You just come to each class. They have all the subjects, but I don't see any, you know, job experiences or anything.

> If we're in Health and Fitness, we should get more health equipment so that we could get used to it—the kinds of things that we'd be using in the hospital.

> We should get a chance to work with our hands. So maybe like, bring in a frog or something to dissect so we could get used to it.

"We should get a chance to work with our hands."

> We don't go on no trips. Beginning of the year they say we'd be goin' on trips. Not one trip.

At another school, students complained about the lack of opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the communications field. They asserted that their suggestions to teachers about trips to radio and television stations, possible connections to a university's communications program or internships with area businesses and non-profit organizations had fallen on deaf ears. Originally excited about their choice of SLCs, these students grew disappointed and frustrated by lack of direction, support, and real content.

Standards for Student Work

Many students described their course work as too easy. They worried that they were insufficiently challenged now and inadequately prepared for college. Older students planning for college complained that they weren't able to study

foreign languages, weren't reading Shakespeare, hadn't had experience writing research papers, and had no access to advanced courses.

Student Focus Group

Student 1: [What I want is] courses preparing me for college. What they're teaching, it's not fast enough. Twelfth graders tellin' me they're not ready for college.

Student 2: Science and math are ok. Everything else I can sit back and relax. But I want to learn something. I want to walk out knowing something.

Student 3: It took us until we're about to graduate to learn that we haven't learned anything. Anybody here goin' to college is not prepared ... You go in with As, you might become average in college.

Researcher: How is it you became aware that you don't have the education you need?

Student: 2: I went to Temple for two summers. I can tell by professors I had that I'm not prepared.

Student 1: I went to school in Connecticut, we took college courses there.

Student 3: I went to a Navy Upward Bound Program ... I came in last. I have As and Bs here.

Student 4: When I started working at K-Mart. It's not that they were smarter than me, but they were more educated than I was. Telling me their stories about what they were goin' through in school.

Student 1: You realize you're going to have to struggle after you leave here, to keep up.

Student 4: We shouldn't had to, but we coulda took extra classes in summer. So we can't blame it all on the school. A school is supposed to give you what you need.

Student 5: You figure out that they don't really expect you to do that much and you can slide by.

Student 6: This is a fairly good school. It was a junior high. It's all beat up and everything, it brings you down. It's a junior high education. It's why everyone here acts like kids. If you were in a better school you'd act better. If you were in a

"You figure out that they don't really expect you to do that much and you can slide by."

worse school you'd act worse. You're a product of your environment.

Student 7: I went to Engineering and Science. I was struggling there to keep a C average. They're smart. There it was a good thing to be the nerd and get straight As. Here it seems the mentality is 'Oh man, I got like six Fs.' Everybody's average [here]. You realize you're going to have to struggle after you leave here, to keep up.

These young people were skilled at discerning appropriate behavior and adapted too easily to the low expectations of teachers. The students recognized and adjusted to the school's norm, but they are worried about their futures. Feeling unchallenged, they invested less of themselves in their schoolwork. Students also recognized when and how expectations and standards differed across classrooms and SLCs. One group of students discussed how their school's SLCs were "tracked" and what this meant for their own investment in learning.

"They don't work the whole year because they know they don't have to."

Student Focus Group

I would change the charters because I think it kind of divides the school. It's like Motivation is smarter than Business Academy, and Urban Studies is just dumb like that ... so I'd take the charters out.

I had three Business classes. I had to get them changed. It was too easy. People was like talking in class, talking over the teachers ...

It gets so boring that I put my head down and I don't copy the notes, but I still be getting Bs on the tests ... It's easier than my charter classes.

Notetaking, outlining, researching at the library, learning to use InfoTrac ... you have to go research many different books to find answers to questions ... You learn a lot more in that class.

When asked what would happen if teachers raised their expectations and standards, one student responded:

> A lotta kids would fail and drop out. But the ones [left] would realize we gotta buckle down, they would get a good education. So if we don't change it, the ones who are passin', are thinkin' they got what they need when they don't. People here who're smart [just] work that last quarter [of the year] and get that A. They don't work the whole year because they know they don't have to.

Still-Segregated Student Knowledge

Following Danielle through her school day reveals both the possibilities and the opportunities lost in an SLC where teaching is competent, but knowledge remains locked in texts disconnected from both student experience and the SLC's focus:

> **From a Researcher's Fieldnotes**
> Community Service Charter is two years old. A home-grown SLC, Community Service offers students the opportunity to participate in service learning activities. Danielle, a perky blond tenth grader, switched from the "academic" SLC she was in as a freshman because she liked the idea of "working at the elementary school with the little kids" and because her friends are in Community Service.
>
> This year, as a tenth grader, Danielle has a "college prep" roster: Spanish, Biology, Geometry, English, World History. She works at the neighborhood elementary school three afternoons a week. Spanish meets at 7:30 a.m. in the new 0 period and it has been a problem subject for Danielle and many of her classmates. The teacher is consistently late, more than half the students are failing the course, and most of these have quit coming to class by early May. Danielle was grounded by her parents last quarter because she made a D. "Today we had a quiz. I only knew about half of them. If you miss, you fail. She doesn't really care if we learn it or not."
>
> Mr. Smith's first period Biology class is conducted in question and answer format, with the text as road map and teacher as guide. Students prepare for a test that is scheduled for the day

after tomorrow. Following a study chart provided for the test, they flood the room with questions. "What's the digestive system for priferi?" "What's a nerve net?" "What's the support system for sponge?" Students become animated as the teacher throws some of their questions back to them, asking them to share their knowledge and observations of sea life. Next period's Geometry class is similar, but with the board taking the place of the text. The class is orderly, with much banter between teacher and students as they solve homework problems. The teacher is sarcastic; Danielle says he's funny and she likes his personality. Other students appear less responsive to the verbal sparring.

Lunch consists of sodas and candy bars for Danielle and her friends. She sits with six white girls in the lunchroom; tables are segregated by race. The girls talk of boyfriends and prom dresses. When asked, they also tell me how school is. Danielle and her friends agree that their courses are too easy. "You figure out that they don't really expect you to do that much and you can slide by." "In 9th grade we found out that we didn't have to work too hard to get an A and so this year we have totally slacked off." Danielle had been an "A" and "B" student in her former, more demanding academic SLC, but her grades have dropped to "Cs" and "Ds" this year.

"Now at the end of the year, there's nothing to do."

The girls have other concerns. One of their friends has "gone back" with a boy who had physically threatened her after they broke up. Some of the girls interpret this as giving in because "she is afraid." Others say, "She just wanted the attention anyway." One girl wonders if her friend would talk to the counselor about it. Danielle changes the subject, directing this comment to me: "This school is prejudiced. I don't know if anybody has told you that yet. Blacks hate the whites and whites hate the blacks. No one wants to admit it, but it's true." But the girls don't want to probe this subject, despite my questions, and talk returns to prom dresses. Around them, students congregate, mainly, but not entirely, in all black or all-white groups.

After lunch, English class is also text-based. Students are given paperback vocabulary books as they come into the room, and class time is devoted to completing the text's matching exercises aloud. The teacher calls on students for responses. They are attentive and compliant. As I leave with Danielle, the teacher explains that "We could do different things in class if the student population were different. It took all year to get this class under control."

Afternoons across the SLC are devoted to community service, which students assert has become "boring" as the year progressed. Several are assigned to assist in a neighborhood elementary school. As the weather has become warmer, the elementary children have grown more energetic. Danielle, who has complained to the charter coordinator that she spends too much of her internship "checking spelling papers and marking homework and not enough working with the kids," says that there's not even much of that to do now that the end of the school year approaches. Another student concurs that the elementary school teachers don't seem to have much for them to do because it's May. One young woman explained, "I got a lot out of it at the beginning of the year. I really felt like I was teaching kids something and everybody was like ready to learn. Now at the end of the year, there's nothing to do. I'll probably cut this afternoon."

The lack of opportunity for student engagement was the most striking feature in the majority of classrooms.

In this slice of SLC life, education is served up in courses with community service offered as dessert. Although an add-on program, service learning appeals in theory and practice to students. But they struggle with segregated knowledge. Which is meaningful work: intern placement or school classes? Why would I stay engaged in this extracurricular activity? Students' lunchroom talk has more to do with community than does their classroom lessons. Lessons enforced student passivity. Service learning provided too little direction and connection back to academics.

Teachers remain unconvinced and uncommitted to transforming teaching and learning. They continue the traditional dynamic—with text up front and students in the back. According to one teacher, teachers could do "different things in the classroom if the student population were different." Trying to fit students into unchanging programs, teachers find students increasingly hard to manage.

The teacher explained, "It took all year to get the kids under control." Teaching in Danielle's SLC is as segregated as her courses. The staff have not begun to explore pedagogy collectively or make connections across classrooms and disciplines. Meanwhile, students, originally enthusiastic about teaching and learning in their community service placement, talk about ways to skip it in late spring. They have learned the lesson that May marks a system-wide shut down of accountability for learning. Students bail out as school remains in session, and learning takes an early vacation.

Conclusion

Students get engaged in learning when: their teachers know, respect, and listen to them; they feel connected with a community of learners; they identify their work as necessary and meaningful for their future; and they understand and respect the standards used for assessment. These conditions for learning were present in only some classrooms and parts of SLC programs. Travelling as a student through a typical day gave researchers a sense of the inconsistencies and gaps in student learning and the toll that disengagement takes on a student's morale and self-expectation. *The lack of opportunity for student engagement* was the most striking feature in the majority of classrooms. The value students place on engagement is explicit, passionate, and persuasive:

"We learned respect when we get to know each other."

Student Focus Group

Researcher to Senior Mentors: How do you get your ninth graders to learn?

Student: Expect things to happen. Go in with a plan, but if something else comes up, deal with that. You have to keep structure, but you have to allow some freestyle to go along with it...

Student: We plan a lot, but we never have to leave early because they like talking about their own experiences. That's how we get them started a lot. Let them talk about their *own* lives.

Student: They understand other peoples' lives and their own after listening ... They find the similarities with different people.

Student: They get interested when we ask questions.

Researcher: What do you do if you get into an argument?

Student: Kristen was the only one with an opinion on one

side and we got into an argument, but it didn't turn into a fight. And we didn't resolve nothin', but everybody got a chance to hear other people's opinions.

Student: It gives people a different way of lookin' at it.

Researcher: Do you think the ninth graders or yourselves have gotten more out of Peer Mentoring?

Students: (*Agreeing*) We have.

Student: People here used to hate HIM, never talked to THEM. Now I finally understand their point of view. We learned respect when we get to know each other. Everyone has their own little cliques, and this threw us all together. You get a chance to form an opinion and speak your opinion. Like in classes you never get a chance to talk about it.

Student: I think ninth graders shoulda' gone on the [three day] retreat. Ninth graders' group got messed up [by rostering] ... They don't want to open up to every person that comes in there and then get let down every time.

Urban students often encounter social, economic and educational odds that mitigate heavily against their school success. But as we have heard, when offered opportunity, help, and a receptive audience, these students can be insightful and articulate spokespersons for their own educational dilemmas and desires. They bring critical insight into structures, strategies, and relationships that hinder and support their engagement with school. Their reflections over time on their lives and learning potentially have much to teach about school reform efforts that make a difference.

Asking students about school provides them the opportunity to practice reflection and action, the essential dynamic of learning.

However, adolescents often give a harsh critique about their education and it can be demoralizing to hear their views—especially for urban teachers already discouraged by an alienating bureaucracy and the circumstances of their students' lives. Students unschooled in reflection remain silent, sometimes shy, sometimes sullen, then break out with grievances or shocking news, then retreat or argue or repeat and have a hard time listening, responding, building from what has been said.

Asking students about school provides them the opportunity to practice reflection and action, the essential dynamic of learning. It makes school reform a site for their learning. It potentially moves them into active shapers of their school experience, affording them the possibility to strategize their negotiation of school individually, with each other, and, most productively, with the adults with whom they are too often locked into roles of resistant, alienated adolescents. Reform is neither something to be delivered to kids nor something they can hand to adults.

Attending to students' voices also provides a window into how students are redefining their roles and behavior as part of the reform, offering adults an assessment of where they are in the transition to becoming the kinds of engaged, invested, and active learners that reforming schools seek to nurture and must have in order to succeed. Adults inside schools need opportunities to hear, take seriously, think through and address students' concerns. A question for the next generation of reform: *How do we help students and adults move into authentic conversations, not just about schooling in general, but about what's actually happening in* their *schools?*

CHAPTER III

SCHOOLS IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE

> The longest distance in American education is that between policy declarations and what will actually go on in the head of a child in the classroom. (Schrag, 1995)

> Dilemmas are troublesome situations of tension, trade-offs, and competing consequences, no matter what the solution. (Glickman, 1994)

In the previous chapter we heard students assess their education. Students say that the reform *vision* of small learning communities where adults and students come to know each other well through engaged teaching and learning is what they want and need from school. Students value the real delivery of SLC promise when SLCs plan programs across disciplines and across traditional boundaries between vocational and academic education, secondary and higher education. They engage in school when teachers mentor them and collectively plan and support educational programs that bridge the gap between school and students' lived experience.

In this chapter we examine the territory where reform vision and initiatives met the real conditions in schools. Case studies of five schools provide chronology and context for understanding how Philadelphia high schools have created small learning communities and developed school-based management/shared decision-making. They show how the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative's support for expanded opportunities for professional development gave teachers the resources for restructuring.

One purpose of case studies is to see reform from the perspectives of adults working inside schools—teachers, para-professionals, counselors, administrators, and sometimes parents. Ethnographic research documents the daily life of people and their points of view on what is going on around them. It assumes that most of the time people are so accustomed to their daily routines and so busy in doing them that they aren't able to pay attention to what is happening. Daily life in schools becomes invisible, not only to far away policy makers, but also to those in schools making the real moment-to-moment decisions.

3 Quotes in Chapter III are by teachers unless otherwise noted.

The case studies also reveal how funding streams, policy mandates and reform initiatives converge at the school site. What becomes clear in schools' stories is that new initiatives enter schools already structured by their history, by their multiple constituencies and by a set—often a hierarchy—of programs and structures. Contextual factors at the school and District levels figure prominently in the stories of reform that follow and will continue to do so as schools engage with *Children Achieving*. As discussed in the introduction to this report, the convergence of Collaborative, District, state and federal funding and mandates created a confusing and sometimes debilitating context for school change. When this context remains invisible, it is too easy to lay reform's disappointments at the feet of teachers, principals, and students. As these case studies zoom in to capture reform at the moment when the "rubber meets the road," when policy intersects with school culture and school history, they remind us how the actions and inactions of those *outside* schools have supported and subverted reform.

A review of reform initiatives provides a conceptual map as we enter the labyrinths of comprehensive high schools.

1. The first initiative, *decentralization*, focuses on changing organizational structures . It is enacted in both the District's movement to school-based management and schools' creation of small learning communities. The purpose of decentralization is to put important decisions in the hands of the people closest to teaching and learning and closest to community will and responsibility for program development and student achievement. In Philadelphia, the goal of decentralization is the creation of communities connected by common purposes, tasks, and shared students. Questions about decentralization to ask of schools' stories include:

    - How have schools and small learning communities become sites for real decision-making about such things as allocation of resources, personnel, curriculum, instruction and assessment?

    - How are small learning communities bounded—protected and separated? How are they fluid or underdefined inside the larger context of the school? (For example, how are traditionally centralized student support services, such as counseling and discipline, carried out in reforming schools?)

2. A second reform initiative, *shared decision-making*, aims to expand and develop participation in envisioning, implementing, and monitoring the school

reform agenda. It seeks to change human interactions. This initiative is enacted in school-wide shared decision-making through: governance councils and other expanded school leadership groups; broader and more informal forums like ad hoc faculty discussion and planning groups, parent meetings, and student events. It also includes participation at the SLC level. Relevant questions for this initiative include:

- How have those perceived as reform's implementors (teachers and administrators) and those perceived as reform's recipients (students and parents) participated in constructing the reform agenda?

- How have ways of participating, representing, and leading changed over time and shifting circumstances?

3. A third initiative is *professional development*, an explicit, long-term agenda of the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative's reform efforts. Traditionally offered through such mechanisms as one-shot presentations at faculty, the Collaborative sought to re-configure professional development by offering extended summer institutes, on-site technical assistance and consultation by "friendly outsiders," and extensive resources for schools in cross-site networks.

   - How have schools and small learning communities become sites for professional development?

   - Who has led professional development and who has participated?

   - How have schools and SLCs shaped and *been shaped by* professional development?

The actions and inactions of those *outside* schools have supported and subverted reform.

Sketches of the five high schools highlight factors in the evolution of restructuring and provide a big picture of reform.

Smith High School, a relatively small school with a heterogeneous student population, was an early entry into restructuring. Its story documents how stable reform leadership by administration and teachers with reform resources can steadily inch reform forward. Small learning communities take root and become important sites for teacher investment—and competition for perennially inadequate resources. Forays into interdisciplinary teaching and learning around SLC themes and student supports like Family Group and Peer Mentoring begin to make a difference for some students. Then an administrative mandate

for school-wide special education inclusion challenges both SLC and teacher decision-making and long-held assumptions about which students can learn what.

New Hill High School, another small school and early restructuring entry, serves neighborhood African American students. Interactive relationships with the surrounding community and school-wide Family Group put many students in supportive relationships with caring adults and make the school a haven for young people. Small learning communities are not the significant reform story, because they do not yet have sufficient roster boundaries for teachers to shape curriculum designed for shared students. Instead, a myriad of programs dot the school landscape and support pockets of innovative teaching and learning.

Peterson High School's turbulent recent leadership and staff history is in sharp contrast with Smith and New Hill. A medium-sized school serving poor, primarily African-American students, Peterson struggles to revise magnet programs and develop strong new SLCs that can turn around student alienation and achievement. Adults seek reasons to invest in reform, given the school's difficult history.

Norton High School's teacher leadership has provided stability during administrative shifts and changes in student population. Community and faculty investment in strong older programs left newer SLCs with the challenge of bridging the academic/vocational split. Strong partnerships with outsiders have bolstered some SLCs' efforts to innovate, especially in the areas of strengthening teachers' collegial community and connecting students and teachers to learning opportunities in "the real world" outside of school.

Marathon High School, the largest of the five schools, offers a look at the beginnings of an intensive restructuring effort. Building upon the hard-learned lessons of other schools, Marathon practices reflection on change to ground itself during a tumultuous first year of decentralization. In small learning communities, teachers and students work to build community identity and responsibility but remain anxious about future detracking decisions and about finding a balance between autonomy and interdependence in a "campus of SLCs."

Smith High School: Re-Forming a Family

Student Enrollment:	1,190	
	White 34%	Latino 7%
	African American 36%	Asian American 23%
	Students from Low Income Families 85%	
Small Learning Communities: 4		3 Home Grown Charters 1 Academy
Governance/Leadership Group:		Informal group (SLC coordinators and roster chairs) meets at the discretion of the principal.
Number of Principals in Period 1988-1995:	2	

> Seven or eight years ago, all ESL students [mostly Asian American] stayed in two rooms, and the rest of the white and black students said they smelled. Now in the Languages SLC there is much more of a mix.
>
> Traditionally, dropouts, attendance, high achievement—who addressed them? Not departments. Now, small learning communities are responsible for student success.
>
> Lots of discussion has to go on. Where is the discussion between these small learning communities? [Should it be] coordinator to coordinator? How can you dispel rumors and deal with inequities if you never meet as 80 [faculty] ?

Now in its fourth year of restructuring, Smith High School has met some of the knottiest issues of reform: detracking and remixing students into SLCs, special education inclusion, and devolution of decision-making to SLCs. With the hindsight afforded by feedback from this "Five School Study," staff could see and assess their progress. But the path of change has been uneven, at times unclear.

A charter coordinator dubbed it "One step forward, two steps back." 1994-95 was a particularly contentious year as the school implemented inclusion of a large special education population and algebra for *all* students—major changes within Smith as well as pioneering efforts within the system.

Smith is a multiracial school in a white working-class neighborhood of row houses. Students are Euro American, African American, and Asian American. The staff is mainly white, around 20% black, with a few Asian American and Latino staff. In the schoolyard and inside the five-story building, "you can see the mix" of student friendships across race. By 8 a.m., many staff members talk in friendly groups in the mail room. Later at lunch, staff and students seem to un-mix racially. Students come and go through the neighborhood mainly in their racial groups. Outside, after school, playing basketball in the parking lot, standing on corners and sitting on stoops, the whites reclaim their neighborhood.

"School is a mix of everybody," an African American girl explained. "Home: you talk on the phone. You be more afraid of what the parents might say if you go over there. So you just—leave it in school." A Latino boy said, "The school's based on neighborhood. I'm alone here." For some, Smith represents the melting pot, for others it remains segregated and mistrustful. The reform plan envisioned the school as the crucible of change, of remixing the segregation of Philadelphia's neighborhoods.

When the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative and District launched high school restructuring, Smith was small—900 students—with a "family identity" among staff. Its population had almost equal proportions of African American, Euro American and Asian American students, roughly segregated within the schools' programs for Enterprise and college bound (majority white), special education (majority black) and ESL (mostly Asian). The special education and ESL programs acted as magnets attracting "special needs" students to the school. Originally a junior high, the school became a senior high and graduated its first senior class in 1991. A staff "old timer" contrasted Smith to the "hard" ways of many high schools:

> [Smith] has a junior high atmosphere in terms of everyone knowing each other. We have similar goals—the kids come first. I worried when new people came in that they'd bring in the rigidity from high schools but they went our way and didn't foist the cold high school attitudes on us.

Many parents prefer Smith to the 2,500 student comprehensive high school that also serves the area. Smith is safer and friendlier.

In 1990-91, a former Department Head returned as principal, presiding over the first senior high graduation. The previous principal had led the school into reform, and an energetic team designed the school's restructuring plan, with the help of an organizational consultant. The staff participated in professional development experiences with the Coalition of Essential Schools.

The first Governance Council is remembered fondly by most who participated. They spoke of "exciting times" and "democracy at work" among a group of people committed to reform and "whole school minded." "The process and spirit" of the council were important. "Multiple perspectives" were shared, there was "time even for silence, to think things through and listen." The principal valued this process:

> It was the idea that we would talk it through, it wasn't top down, and we didn't necessarily vote. The council worked at consensus. I knew I had veto power but I never wanted to use it. I learned a lot about collegiality.

The first turning point in governance came when the staff narrowly voted down the proposal for SBM. Teachers whose program had not been granted charter status (and money) from the Collaborative saw reform as "unfair." Unequal resources among small learning communities has remained a source of conflict and mistrust. A second unresolved issue was: Did failure of the SBM vote mean that staff rejected shared-governance? After the Governance Council's first year, more staff wanted to participate and it was re-formed to make it more representative of the wider staff. But before it could practice low-stakes decision-making, it was faced with district-wide budget cuts with a new mandate: central office decreed that schools themselves should decide which staff positions to cut. The PFT advised the Governance Council to refuse to participate in such decisions. The principal and union representative decided that the Council had effectively stalemated over the issue, and the Council was dissolved.

"There was time even for silence, to think things through and listen."

The staff's views of Governance Council history differ on the question of power: Where was the real power of decision-making? A member of the first council said, "We had no power really because we didn't get the 75% vote" for SBM, but disbanding it was unfair, done by the principal and building representative when they decided "that was the thing to do. Now it's business as usual." Others, par-

ticularly in leadership positions, think that a Council could productively discuss the whole-school issues unresolved within SLCs. Still others think the council is not a loss because SLCs have grown more autonomous and democratic over three years and therefore "they should be the center of decisions." One teacher looked beyond the school to make sense of Smith's governance struggles:

> Downtown decisions were limiting the options that schools had open to them anyway. Since then it's been about changing the rules to fit into molds and get money. We can't keep asking people to reorganize and not give them the tools; teachers are burnt.

Small Learning Communities

All four SLCs at Smith grew from older programs. All were designed using the Collaborative's criteria, resources and multiple professional development opportunities for SLCs. Many faculty participated in Coalition of Essential Schools teambuilding. Conferences and in-house planning were guided by Essential Questions. Many faculty participated together in professional development, further developing the "family" and "whole-school" and "student-friendly" identity of Smith that was essential to its early reform plans.

Downtown decisions limit options and change rules for schools.

As SLCs tightened roster boundaries for students and faculty, competition among SLCs sharpened as inequities and differences emerged. Some older programs like ESL and special ed had lower student-teacher ratios, some had more textbook money, some had more professional development opportunities. The "good students" were perceived to be the former ESL students, most of whom stayed in the Languages SLC. Other "good students" came from across the city, selected for the Academy program (changed for 1995-96). The Academy classrooms were refurbished. Students in the other three SLCs were incensed at the deteriorating conditions of the rest of the building, its peeling paint, broken bathrooms, and erratic heating.

Each of the four SLCs developed partnerships with area colleges, coordinating opportunities for Smith students and faculty. The Collaborative paid for a College Access program for all students. Teacher interns from a local university brought new energy and ideas to both faculty and students in one SLC. Social work interns strengthened that SLC's student support network and contributed to faculty planning. The SLC's Family Group training paid off in its improved student-teacher relations and innovative teaching dynamics. A Senior

Mentoring program benefited from its foundation in several years of Family Group.

One SLC developed interdisciplinary curricula with a university consultant funded by the Collaborative, forming the heart of the SLC's identity. A second SLC worked with a community college to design 16 interdisciplinary student projects to tie together their SLC's four-year program. Common themes built on student proficiencies with communication, computers, and multicultural perspectives. Consultants came from the college and Collaborative, computers came from a voc ed grant, textbooks came from ESL and SLC funds. Student trips and team building among SLC faculty were funded by the SLC budget. A third SLC used a former program of student service projects, developed further through Coalition of Essential Schools training and a new partnership with a local business college.

Staff offered a variety of perspectives on SLCs at Smith. Because SLCs spent their first two years securing the basic boundaries that provide community cohesion, most teachers now teach the majority of their classes in one SLC and students are assigned to a particular SLC. One SLC, the Academy, is contained in a single section of the building but the other three are more dispersed throughout. Coordinators report that SLCs made some decisions about the courses they offer, but that other teaching and learning innovations "die" in the roster room. For example, some interdisciplinary courses get rostered back to back and some don't. The roster gives no common planning time for SLC teachers.

Underlying SLC rivalry is anxiety about de-tracking.

Without an overall Council or other leadership group, the collectively shared power across the school that began to emerge with the first Governance Council eroded. SLC coordinators negotiated with the principal and the roster office and bargained for resources from the Collaborative, Perkins vocational education funding; they forged outside partnerships with Community College and Pierce Enterprise School. Teachers invested in their SLCs. Some saw the competition between SLCs as destructive of the old family unity. Others saw it as creating needed change for students by stimulating teachers to make their SLC programs relevant and their staff supportive of student needs.

Underlying SLC rivalry is anxiety about de-tracking: how old programs would be re-formed into truly heterogeneous student groups. The de-tracking design of Smith's restructuring team had worked half way. White and black students were more mixed into the academic and Enterprise-oriented SLCs. Black and white students joined Asian American students in the SLC with the language

program. By the fourth year of restructuring, the old program hierarchy had been modified to the point where "Enterprise" students assumed college as one of their choices, and academic and language students assumed that a vocation was one of their post-high school choices. By ability, race, and special needs, students were more mixed into the three SLCs. Both students and faculty identified the unequal resources behind SLC rivalries and the need for joint decision-making about them; some SLCs had new books and desks and computers, the "good" students, which then attracted good teachers and even further funding. The rest got "leftovers."

Inclusion

In the fourth year "inclusion" radically pushed the de-tracking process by adding the large special ed population equally into the "regular classes" of three SLCs. The principal's mandate of inclusion served to redirect the old SLC rivalries into collective resentment against such a "stick" forcing change. With no more "carrots" of District or Collaborative money for staff training, this mandate struck hard. Teachers grew frustrated with the daily classroom realities of implementation, and the inadequate resources and authority for problem-solving. Most staff said they were "for inclusion—but not the way it was done here," meaning the top-down and full-speed-ahead and full-inclusion sweep of the process.

Inclusion forced key issues of reforming teaching and learning.

For students and teachers, inclusion forced key issues of reforming teaching and learning: high standards for all in heterogeneous classrooms and "what happens to students who fail;" pedagogy and what kinds of instructional strategies work for whom; and discipline and the student-teacher responsibilities embedded in it.

Before inclusion, these issues were addressed by reform initiatives that were largely voluntary. Some teachers had pioneered changes in their classrooms, supported by ongoing professional networks of Philadelphia Writing Project and its Seminar on Teaching and Learning, Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and Collaborative inside-outside partnerships. But inclusion hit almost everyone and raised the stakes on all teaching and learning issues. In the first year of inclusion, more students failed courses, created discipline problems, challenged or rejected teachers' pedagogy, and failed to engage with teachers' planned curricula. Teachers felt over-ruled and undermined by the mandate, unprepared for this new work, and unfairly assigned responsibility for the "drowning" students around them.

Inclusion also put special education teachers into often ill-defined roles as supports for special education students in regular classrooms. Many resented losing their own classrooms—"We're just classroom assistants now!" Some have negotiated co-teaching partnerships while others have divided kids into special-needs work arrangements within the classroom.

Smith's inclusion generated much dissension and a union grievance. It also forced the issue of governance and the boundaries of teachers' authority to address school-wide concerns and SLCs' authority to make instructional decisions. Most staff noted a shift in the principal's stance—a movement away from participatory processes after the first SBM vote. A few thought that the principal had little choice because of pressures from central office and recognized that principals received few if any incentives from central office to share authority with their staffs. The rumor mill circulated many stories of how principals were reprimanded by superiors when disagreements among faculty and/or with parents/community surfaced in their buildings. Democracy at work churned up and sometimes turned into complaints to central office and PFT.

Some saw the principal as ambitious. "He wants to be seen as a pioneer." When the district didn't provide the professional development needed for teachers to implement inclusion, "He got burnt"—by the anger of his own staff. For others, inclusion is simply a bureaucratic mandate, its source unclear: "The big decisions come from the principal. He decided we would have inclusion. It may have come from downtown."

"The big decisions come from the principal. He decided we would have inclusion."

Conclusion

In contrast to the erosion of collectivity at the whole school level, most agree that there is a growing sense of shared ownership inside the SLCs. Coordinators are central to their colleagues' learning about collective decision-making and program development. Coordinators are leaders among teachers who must negotiate for the SLCs with administrative skill and responsibility. One coordinator said, "I'm the sounding board for charter staff, but I have to be the conduit and buffer too." Coordinators attributed their leadership skills to their participation on the first governance council and to Coalition of Essential Schools training. Staff voiced satisfaction with coordinators and the opportunity for female leadership in what had been a male dominated school.

Reflecting back on teacher investment in SLC decisions at the end of the SLC's third year, one teacher began with her frustrations: teachers "putting a wall up"

against group efforts, teachers being temperamental, and others "using kid gloves and tiptoeing to keep the peace." But she ended with her realization of the big changes since the SLC began:

> Central administration was the *principal* (before SLCs). People would grouse if they were not informed of openings and equity in the process of selection. Now we're a charter; people now feel not only they should know everything in the charter, but also they have a right in the decision-making process to effect the outcome. They're outraged if they're not involved. People feel invested: they have a right to know and be a part of the process. This is, of course, unrealistic if it's a quick or administrative decision.

We leave Smith with many questions but some that stand out include:

Who is responsible for assessing how and if inclusion is working in each classroom, and what decision-making power do they have?

Who will call for reflection and dialogue about past, current, and future reform efforts? How can the whole school move into such forums?

What happens to students who fail? Who succeed?

"People now feel they have a right in the decision-making process to effect the outcome."

What is the responsibility of the District to provide leadership, coherent policy, and adequate resources to manage the transition to inclusion? How might it mobilize supports across its own bureaucratic boundaries of regular and special education?

What do regular ed teachers need to know about teaching special ed students? What do special ed teachers need to know to work in regular ed classrooms? How might both groups be supported? How do special and regular ed teachers collaborate and negotiate their roles in the classroom?

New Hill High School: Community Building in School

Student Enrollment:	989
White 1%	Latino 1%
African American 98%	
Students from Low Income Families 93%	
Small Learning Communities: 3	1 Home Grown Charter 1 Academy 1 Motivation
Governance Group:	Instructional Cabinet
Number of Principals in Period 1989-1995:	2

From a Researcher's Fieldnotes

At the end of the community engagement meeting, one of its organizers turned to me and said, "All these community meetings are different, but the other schools seem angrier than this one."

Dr. Brown co-teaches the ninth and tenth grade Interactive Math Classes as a way to educate others in the approach. The eleventh and twelfth are taught entirely by classroom teachers. On this day a class of tenth graders from across the three small learning communities meet with Dr. Brown and Mr. Lewis in the library. They sit at tables in randomly formed groups of 4-5; the students are re-grouped periodically over the course of the year. Directions for students are on an overhead and Mr. Lewis "sets up" the problems of the day. Dr. Brown and Mr. Lewis pass out calculators and student folders and then circulate among the groups. Dr. Brown encourages groups: "This young man has been out, we'll have to help him catch up." "This group needs someone's help, who can join them?" "If he goes up, will the others in his group support him if he runs into difficulty?" Mr. Lewis, less accustomed to cooperative learning, focused on individuals, "You got that wrong. Can anyone else do it?"

New Hill High School sits on an important neighborhood thoroughfare, one block from a public transit hub and two from a sprawling city park. The African-American neighborhood includes: blocks of row homes well tended with residents sitting on stoops exchanging news; a building-sized mural of African-American city and spiritual leaders that looms over a city garden; and a block of abandoned buildings. The school's official entrance suggests a relatively modern, medium-sized school. But the building forms a giant V rising four stories with one arm that holds a pre-school program, an elementary school, and district regional offices and the other the middle and high schools.

The neighborhood fought hard for this school in the 1960s and teachers and parents share and appreciate the school's history in the community:

> I'm now teaching children whose parents I taught. It's nice.
>
> You are treated like you belong and it encourages you to want to come back. I feel like all the students' parent. (Parent)

Staff and parents also value the school's small size (approximately 900 students), its safety, and the neighborhood's stability. But staff struggle with "racial isolation" issues in a school with all African-American students and a faculty that is approximately half white and half black. Black teachers and parents want racial insensitivity named and dealt with; white teachers bristle when they perceive that discussions about "what's best for *our* children" marginalize them and their contribution.

"Family Group is an arena where children get to care, share with peers and a caring adult."

Community involvement has been a priority at the school. Staff, students, and parents said community outreach efforts make a difference to school climate and contribute to a sense of "family." Reciprocal school/community relations actively engage parents through:

- A Parent Center organized as a space within the school where parents gather and where activities grow out of the interests, needs, and concerns of parents;

- Educational programs for community adults which encourage them to see schools as sites for life-long learning, not simply warehouses for their young;

- Parent participation in the school's Mediation Program.

The school-wide practice of Family Group brings students into closer relatio ships with one another and school personnel (teachers, non-teaching assistants secretaries, and cafeteria staff).

> Family Group is an arena where children get to care, share with peers and a caring adult.

> **From a Researcher's Fieldnotes**
> *A teacher recounted the following:* Darrell called for a meeting of Family Group. He had been told by a friend that he was being abused at home. What should Darrell do? The young people talked it though, sharing their own decisions and experiences with "telling." Through the discussion the teacher and Darrell constructed a way to report the abuse together.

Several teachers described how personal connections with students built in Family Group serve to defuse daily classroom issues (e.g. missing homework, tardiness) that can escalate into adult-student show downs. But some staff have remained uncomfortable with Family Group, sometimes questioning its purposes, at other times their own abilities to make it a meaningful support for students with so many problems. Some are uncomfortable with the challenge of communicating with students who are so different by race and class. Others say they don't want "that kind of relationship with kids" and strongly resent the "coercion that everyone has to do it."

An in-house suspension room provides immediate consequences for students who disrupt classrooms.

Peer mentoring and mediation have fostered helping relationships among older and younger students and offered parents a caring role with their neighborhood young people.

> **From a Researcher's Fieldnotes**
> Twelfth grade girls who had been in school together since their elementary years were embroiled in repeated angry exchanges. Harsh words, hurt feelings, hostile glares spilled from hallways and the street into classrooms. The school's peer mediation program which has a number of parents as mediators became a site for problem solving. Mothers of the girls were convened to explore first their own histories with

> teen friendships, and then to meet as an expanded group of mothers *and* daughters to talk through anger, hurt and relationships. A teacher reflected, "They shared their experiences as teenagers and as mothers" and a "sense of sisterhood" was established. A parent proudly asserted, "We all get involved with the students. We know they have special interests and needs. We are family ... we learn, share, grow, talk, brainstorm."

A recent innovation, an in-house suspension room, serves up to 15 students a day providing immediate consequences for students who disrupt classrooms. The two teachers who oversee the room included communication with parents as integral follow-up activities with students who are acting out:

> We follow up on every student in here ... We contact the parents and at the same time ... We make recommendations for counseling. Whatever we feel is necessary that will benefit the student. A lot of times the regular teacher doesn't have the time to spend in the analysis of each student, whereas we can get involved a little more.

They also emphasized giving individual attention to students as they complete their assignments, but allowing no interaction among their charges. Before students leave, the teachers ask each one: What are you going to do when you return to the classroom? What problems do you need to address and what are some strategies that you can use? Students also fill out a questionnaire about their experience in the in-house suspension room.

Governance

Many mark the beginning of restructuring at New Hill with the arrival of a principal who promoted multiple initiatives at the school, including Family Group, Peer Mentoring, the creation of a Parent Center, Science Force 2000, Interactive Math, and affiliation with the Coalition of Essential Schools. To some it felt like a new era, to others that reform was about "throwing different programs against a wall and seeing what sticks."

Teachers and parents see New Hill's strength as creating a safe haven for young people built upon caring relationships. But these connections have not made

school governance less complicated or treacherous for adults. While many teachers invested in the interim governance council, it ultimately fizzled.

> All of a sudden you didn't hear about it [school-based management] anymore and that was the end of it.

> I got tired and disgusted and didn't care any more after two years. Because we were talking about school-based management it could be said that we were a school-based management school, but it was a farce. We never took the vote. The bottom line was we really didn't think we would have that much say.

> We were getting the responsibility but not the authority. That was my major turn-off about it. Any of the major decisions—personnel, money, allotments—it didn't seem like we had any say in these. We had say over some minor issues, a program, some books ... The major problem was people thought we were a governing council, but we were just to get a governance council in place. They thought we had a lot of say, but we didn't. Then the word came down that those [schools] that had an interim council, that they would become the governing council and people were confused. When we were appointed, we were to bring about the change, but not to make decisions. What we were was never really firmed up. I believed in the concept, but thought it would never really work as it was being implemented. I ended up working against it. After [a previous Assistant Superintendent for High Schools] left the high school office, school-based management pretty much died everywhere.

"We were getting the responsibility but not the authority."

Teachers have led some initiatives, such as Science Force 2000 and the In-house Suspension program. But the principal remained the instigator for most change efforts: she worked to devolve responsibility to SLCs and the instructional leadership team and wondered what it would take for staff to come forward. During 1994-95, she encouraged teachers to design professional development and share their expertise, but by mid-year no one had taken up the opportunity. Nor had staff come forward to plan a system of peer consultation and coaching that would replace administrative observations. Staff, for their part, questioned if the principal heard their input and if substantive decision-making would be shared.

> They [administration] would get your ideas and then a decision was made unilaterally or with a small group using some of the stuff that staff said. But in some ways, the decision had been made, and you were just made to feel you had input.

> I'm not a person with power; just a soldier. Restructuring [was] handed to us, we just carry it out.

> We should be consulted as to how we spend the money, since we are accountable ... give the coordinator the money to spend.

Small Learning Communities

In 1994-95 all New Hill students and teachers were assigned to one of three SLCs: Inspiration and the Enterprise Academy, both pre-existing programs, or Criminal Justice, a new home-grown charter. Staff agreed that the three SLCs currently serve different "kinds of students" and that Criminal Justice has "more than its share" of students who need special supports (truants, special education students). Data from the second report period in 1994-95 also point to differences. Average daily attendance rates ranged from 80% for Inspiration students, 76% for Enterprise Academy, 63% for Criminal Justice.

> The issue here is heterogeneity—which charters have which students.

> Another problem is that when they had only two charters there was no stigma on the students who weren't in them. When they went into charters, Criminal Justice became known as having all the dummies and none of the kids wanted to be in it ... We've put the official stamp on them of a negative stigma.

Most teachers teach across SLCs. This strategy is deliberate so that teachers can work with a range of ability levels; none are "stuck with the lower level kids," most of whom are in one SLC.

> The concept of charters as places where certain students and teachers are located doesn't exist. For example, in the math

department we teach students from all the charters. They're all mixed up.

I fully support the charter movement providing there are courses that are not just charter-based. Some courses have to be offered across charters to get enough students. Otherwise charters are completely tracked. Right now ours are tracked, but so are all those across the city. Unless you have a high school doing all brand new home-grown charters, any place you had a Motivation program before and kept it there, the school is tracked. Our school has three charters that looked like academic, commercial and general. We're trying to break that down. (Principal)

Some teachers want the collegial community that more tightly bounded SLCs would offer. They point to the missed possibilities of working together with a group of students over time and want students and teachers to participate in only one SLC:

Being a small community of teachers who plan together is important because at least that way we could decide how to deal with the kind of students we have.

Charters help us [teachers] know kids—what approach to take with them. It would be easier if kids and teachers were rostered in the charter/academy they were assigned to.

The issue here is hetero-geneity—which charters have which students.

Students who take classes in different SLCs observed differences in rigor and expectations across classes and SLCs.

I would change the charters because I think it kind of divides the school. It's like Inspiration is smarter than Enterprise Academy, and Criminal Justice is just dumb like that ... so I'd take the charters out. (Student)

I had three Enterprise classes. I had to get them changed. It was too easy. People was like talking in class, talking over the teachers." (Student)

Notetaking, outlining, researching at the library, learning to use InfoTrac ... you have to go research many different books

to find answers to questions ... You learn a lot more in that class. (Student)

The school is strategizing about more heterogeneity in SLCs:

I agree that there have to be some changes in the way kids are assigned to charters because all the kids with difficulties were going to one charter. But it's creating a new set of problems.

The Ninth Grade Institute was a nice transition for students. I'm not certain that students are ready to choose a charter when they are in eighth or ninth grade.

The more academic students choose Inspiration. This may be because the Inspiration charter coordinator recruits them in middle school.

... Over the years, as we moved to a fully chartered school [our SLC has] been diluted ... We have students that don't want to be in [our program] or follow the requirements.

We have a large group of students who are afraid of trying because they're afraid of failing.

Criminal Justice, when it first came on board was the dumping ground charter, because it didn't have a career focus. So last year we gave it a career focus. Any kid who says he wants to be a lawyer, instead of going to Inspiration goes to Criminal Justice. Inspiration is the hardest nut to crack because that's been around the longest and the community wants it to stay the same. I'm trying to do with it what I did with Criminal Justice. I'm saying they have a career focus, engineering and science, which they had before. If you wanted to be an engineer you went to Inspiration. But now you go there if you want to be a technician too. (Principal)

Conclusion

In March, a new principal assessed the school he was taking on:

We have some pockets of excellence here and we are meeting the needs of some groups of kids, but not meeting the needs of

> all the kids in the school. We have a large group of students who are afraid of trying because they're afraid of failing.

More than any school in the study, New Hill has been able to forge community among students and with parents, creating a school where many students feel safe and cared about. It has offered both groups opportunities to reflect about themselves and their role in the life of the school. But New Hill faces challenges and raises questions that apply to many schools.

What are the criteria for assessing school-wide efforts like Family Group? How do people learn to critique and revise, not throw out?

How does a community (school or SLC) handle dissent? Can teachers remain in their community if they refuse to participate in a school-wide/SLC-wide initiative? Who decides?

Who deliberates and makes decisions about boundaries for SLCs?

Can SLCs move educational programs far enough to make a difference in student achievement without tight structural boundaries that strengthen teachers' commitment and responsibility for their shared students?

What are forums for staff discussions of race and class? How does a whole school address hurt and anger?

What steps might New Hill take to move parent involvement from participation to shared governance?

Peterson High School:
Fragmentation and Instability Disrupt Restructuring

Student Enrollment:	2,083
White 1%	Latino 7%
African American 92%	
Students from Low Income Families	93%
Small Learning Communities: 7	4 Home Grown Charters 1 Motivation 2 Academies
Governance/Leadership Group:	None
Number of Principals in Period 1988-1995:	4

On the frequent change in principals:
Every year we've had a new principal, which means new rules. (Student)

Overall, the changing of principals has been negative for the school. We don't know where we're going ... who's committed to what ... I suppose the principals have had their hearts in the right place, but the vision isn't clear.

On the building:
The school is a maze.

Big, dirty, crazy (Student).

We need to do something about... order here ... It feels too crazy ... The fire bells go off ... We need doors! (Student)

Buffeted by bad architecture and District mandates that have subverted trust and community building, Peterson High School's restructuring efforts have been difficult. The school had four principals in six years. When it was designated a "demonstration school," requiring teachers to take an exam for assignment to the school, many veteran teachers transferred out of the building rather than

"submitting to a test of their teaching competence." At Peterson, teacher leadership has moved reform forward in individual classrooms and, despite overwhelming odds, several SLCs provide the beginnings of community for students. But for most students and teachers, school remains confusing and alienating.

Dubbed "the castle," Peterson High School stands on a major urban corridor looking more like a fortress than a school with windows set several stories high and an entrance tucked away from the street. Acclaimed an architectural masterpiece when it opened, the building has proved a nightmare to everyone. Five buildings cluster around a courtyard that is off limits to students. More than ninety doors make security difficult, so many are chained shut. A large open atrium marks the school's entry and contrasts sharply to narrow hallways which feel cramped and chaotic during class changes. Wire caging marks closed stair wells. Students often arrive late to classes due to distances between buildings. The overall design is one of open space with few doors and walls. Over the years, teachers have demarcated classrooms, using large filing cabinets as walls. But the noise from other classrooms and corridors often makes discussion or lecture impossible. Repeated fire alarms blast several times each class period.

Staff and students repeatedly reported feeling demoralized and unsafe in the school. A teacher described the building as "crummy and dirty, with water leakage everywhere ... teachers are isolated from one another, particularly with the removal of the teachers' lunchroom." Students experienced it as "dirty," "noisy," and "dull." In this environment, fights are commonplace:

"The outsiders didn't trust the insiders."

> There is at least one good fight here a day; girls were fighting yesterday and one girl's shirt and bra got ripped off ... One boy got slammed on the concrete, another girl got slashed with a razor blade. (Student)

Governance

In 1991, the principal who had "ruled the school with an iron hand" for 20 years was transferred. Some had seen her as an autocrat; others looked upon her tenure as a period of stability: "You knew where you stood." Many people in the community took pride in her leadership, perceiving her as an advocate for kids and someone who "knew what she was doing." The principal who followed was perceived as being "committed to reform" by most staff. Some believed that he

was a "visionary" who developed teacher leadership and who had good ideas, some of which "worked and some didn't."

> There was more opportunity for staff development and he [the principal] got people to be engaged for the sake of self-improvement. He planted a lot of seeds in people to help develop their leadership abilities which you now see in the charters.

It was during this administration that the school became a "demonstration" site—a tumultuous and divisive process. Many teachers transferred:

> The prospect of becoming a demonstration school created fear, terror, and discomfort on the part of educators ... Others were angry they were being asked to prove their competence ... As a consequence, many left and school traditions were lost. The transformation resulted in a seasoned, cohesive, veteran faculty being dismantled.

Staff questioned the point of demonstration status: Was it a way of getting rid of the former principal? Of "deadwood" staff? The irony that the District was simultaneously launching its school-based management initiative did not escape teachers who had no say in "demonstration status." The unspoken question was "Whose school is this and who can determine the agenda?"

An interim governance council was created to explore school-based management. Many who participated found the council to be a rewarding experience. But they also found their efforts to engage the larger staff in reform frustrating when the District's commitment to SBM/SDM was questionable at best and the hard decisions about scarce resources landed at the school level.

> The Council wined and dined the staff, but they were still accused of being elitist with special jobs ... new people felt left out ... Ultimately teachers didn't want responsibility for cutting other teachers' positions. It's easier to blame administrators ... They [teachers] didn't want that kind of power.
>
> The same group of people was in everything ... The outsiders didn't trust the insiders and were sure that they would get all the benefits ... which ultimately turned out to be true ... Many

> of the governance members are now coordinators of charters. They knew they had a better chance of getting a charter funded and an inside track on funding.

When the principal retired, the school constituted a selection team which interviewed candidates and sent recommendations to the Superintendent. However, none of the candidates were appointed and instead an acting principal assumed the helm. Not surprisingly, the school ultimately voted against becoming a school-based management site. Staff cited numerous reasons for the defeat but two stood out:

- lack of confidence that the District was serious about school-based management, given the school's experience with being designated a demonstration school and the principal selection process;

- anger and frustration that teachers would be involved in budget decisions now that contracting District funds made it necessary for schools to make cuts in staffing. Teachers worried that relationships with colleagues would be destroyed in the process.

Establishing the degree of trust necessary to move restructuring forward has been extremely difficult at Peterson. With little sense of community among faculty, many teachers have felt unenthusiastic about and unequal to the simultaneous tasks of teaching and restructuring. Staff concerns about participation in decision-making and communication continued under Peterson's fourth principal in as many years.

SLCs provide students with a "connection" and a "safe space."

But with the establishment of a principal's cabinet at the end of the 1995 school year, some staff expressed optimism for improved communication. In addition, staffing has stabilized somewhat and some "old timers" commented that teachers new to the building are a "breath of fresh air," bringing new ideas and energy. Finally the current principal has made improvements to the building her top priority and staff noted how hard she has worked to correct serious flaws in the physical plant.

Small Learning Communities

Peterson entered restructuring with two SLCs: Media Magnet and Enterprise Academy, both created to attract students from across the city and to offer an option to "good neighborhood kids who were leaving the community to attend magnet schools." Many teachers expressed enthusiasm for SLCs as a way to provide Peterson students with a "connection" and a "safe space."

> Moving into charters was good for students because it helped them have a sense of identity within the school.

> The effects of charters on student achievement encompasses more than improved grades and attendance; morale is up, student government is strong.

Despite staff's endorsement of small learning communities, the school has created few of the structural conditions needed for building community and cohering curriculum within the SLC's. Most teachers teach in more than one SLC; many teach in more than two. Students, for the most part, have classes both within and outside their assigned SLC. Some SLCs have carved out regular meeting times for staff members; others have not.

> Without block rostering and common prep times, it becomes difficult to create those needed opportunities to better know the students and work more closely with colleagues ... The administration needs to mandate roster changes.

SLC coordinators are overloaded in many tasks and by carrying much of the spirit of SLCs.

Also, like other schools in the study, SLC coordinators are overloaded with many tasks and with carrying much of the spirit of SLCs, given that most SLCs have not yet gained broad-based buy-in from their teachers:

> Charter coordinators have more to do than department heads and are expected to work after school ... They're like the Energizer bunny where if you don't work hard, you won't get the goodies [for your charter].

In 1994-1995, approximately two-thirds of the student body was rostered into seven SLCs—making it the only school in the study that had not assigned all students to SLCs. Unassigned students tended to be those with poor attendance, special education students, and ninth grade repeaters. As one teacher put it, "...

unfortunately, those students who get kicked out from charters and are unaffiliated are the exact ones in need of small structures." Another teacher queried, "Would you rather be an orphan or adopted?" The average daily attendance for assigned students was 73 percent and for unassigned, 59 percent.

Many Peterson students come from extreme poverty; four public housing projects feed the school. Like other comprehensive high schools, Peterson has two student tiers: the neighborhood kids who are widely perceived by staff as having neither educational options nor aspirations and students from across the city who have been recruited to the school's magnet programs.

> We get good black kids who don't get into Central or Girls. (Teacher, Magnet SLC)

> We sell students and their families on the point that we're a college bound, academic program ... [With heterogeneous grouping] it would be harder to be college bound since the kids in the neighborhood aren't as oriented in that way. (Teacher, Magnet SLC)

> Education of the students is not up to par; they can't spell, punctuate or even punctuate when they copy something from the board ... Not everyone can go to college, some need vocational ed to learn a skill. They don't all have to learn algebra.

"Kids have needs that aren't being met."

> Students will come to my door and say, "Man, come on out of that class." We can't hold them. Kids don't see success with education. We bring in mentors, but that doesn't help because kids don't relate to mentors because they are not a part of their world.

> We need dedicated teachers. Kids have needs that aren't being met. Kids need structure to be responsible.

Race and class factors complicate teachers' perceptions about what's best for students. A teacher concerned about losing an Academy's few white students if the program was no longer able to hand pick its kids, insisted,

> Kids are kids ... but it makes a mockery of desegregation when you have an all black school and both whites and blacks lose the experience of being in a mixed group.

A teacher, arguing for magnet special admission programs within the school, asserted,

> As a black man I almost feel it's a racist policy the School District has because they say let's throw them all in together. We're not all the same ... My parents wanted to separate me from some of the kids in the neighborhood.

One African-American teacher talked about some of the racial issues the school will need to address to carry forward educational renewal:

> [We need to] break down teachers' assumptions about students, since many teachers don't even know how they come across ... Charter teachers don't talk about race ... and even if they go to staff development meetings, it doesn't mean that they'll learn about it ... Racism is more covert. [As a black man] it gives me a huge responsibility to do something about it ... We need to keep these issues in the forefront so we can talk about it.

"We need to break down teachers' assumptions about students, since many teachers don't even know how they come across."

A teacher who participated over time in numerous professional development activities through the Collaborative explained the link between staff development and gaining the confidence and skills necessary to provide engaging rigorous curriculum for *all* students. While she previously believed that "kids in certain neighborhoods should be taught grammar straight out," she has now infused her work with new ideas, e.g. beginning class with everyone, including herself, writing autobiographies. She plans to try out portfolio assessment and problem-based learning next. She described her "transformation through teacher inquiry" from "an old-fashioned, standard teacher who taught the way I was taught" to "a process oriented, holistic teacher."

Professional Development

At Peterson, teachers identified choice—meaning who selects topics and participants for professional development efforts—as critical to how "useful" they find the work. Some teachers have found brief sessions can make a significant difference to their practice when they focus on SLC concerns and students. For ex-

ample, a new arrival to Law and Justice used a program at Temple for guidance on how to connect his American history curriculum to his SLC's theme. One teacher explained,

> In theory, the purpose is to expand teaching techniques and styles, give new ideas, and keep teachers up to date ... Mostly, however, in practice they're not worthwhile ... except where the charter has worked together as a whole to plan and/or develop materials.

Staff members reiterated the importance of taking SLC meeting time to identify and implement shared staff development goals for part or all of the group. One SLC has used after school meeting time to conduct "descriptive reviews" of students in which teachers present a student and ask colleagues to join them in exploring a question about that student. Such activities provide the opportunity for teachers to collectively build knowledge about who their students are and what they need. This past year the school attempted to draw on teachers' expertise by planning teacher-facilitated professional development opportunities which address areas of interest. While a number of staff appreciated this idea, in practice people often did not get their chosen workshops, were informed too late of meeting times, and frequently "too much is jammed in and it's surface stuff."

Another SLC coordinator noted obstacles:

> The union has eliminated meeting time ... Now I get who I get. I can't make them stay after school. Folks will come to Saturday and evening workshops occasionally. Getting consistent every week [meeting] time is hard. The school district makes it hard.

"Getting consistent every week [meeting] time is hard."

Another impediment has been staff turnover. For example, Prodigy Charter focused on strengthening students' sense of self-worth by emphasizing high expectations for achievement and providing curriculum which connects students to their African-American culture and heritage. Many staff both inside and outside the SLC expressed pride in the program and mark its inception as a highlight of restructuring. Students also praised the thrust of the program:

> They teach us about Afro-American culture, it's everywhere in our program. How our people didn't get credit ... It makes

> you see things in your history that you can fall back on, feel proud of; thinking about 'hey man, I got this behind me.' (Student)

However, despite Prodigy's strong leadership, the constant turnover of teachers has undermined professional development efforts to implement such innovations as performance based assessment. Every year has seemed a start-over year, bringing staff on board and trying to get them invested in the SLC's philosophy and approach.

Conclusion

At Peterson, District policies have played havoc with continuity. Like many schools, Peterson had a divisive experience with the District's first school-based management initiative, leaving staff demoralized.

One teacher reflected on the need for common vision at Peterson:

> We were supposed to talk about building community [with the advent of restructuring.] Instead, I see charter coordinator leadership, but no school vision or leadership, no sense of the big picture and how the parts will relate to each other or fit together. We are lost in our disciplines and charters ... restructuring on the macro level is superficial ... there is not much sense of being connected in the school ...

Questions about the future include:

What is necessary for repairing the damaged relationships in this school?

What policies would provide schools and SLCs with the continuity of membership necessary to forward reform? For example, what needs to be considered in moving principals? Who decides?

What might District and school leadership do to generate enthusiasm for a second attempt at a Governance Council under Children Achieving*? How can Peterson capitalize on the teacher leadership that emerged during the last round and build more broad-based support for reform?*

Will SLCs have sufficient boundaries to become real communities for adults and students? Who is accountable for decentralizing this school?

Norton High School: Bridging the Academic/Vocational Split

Student Enrollment: 2,361

White 51%	Latino 6%
African American 41%	Asian American 2%

Percentage of Students from Low Income Families 66%

Small Learning Communities: 7
- 4 Home Grown Charters
- 1 Cities-In-School
- 2 Academies

Governance Group: Cabinet

Number of Principals in Period 1988-1995: 4

From a Researcher's Fieldnotes

Researcher: How would you describe Norton to someone from outside Philadelphia?

Teacher: This is an inner city high school. It's no longer a neighborhood school. Students come here from more than 60 school buildings. Forty-eight percent ride buses to get here. This is a school that, although we have multiple offerings, we are probably more technically oriented than academically oriented. We're a diverse family... a school that has changed ... not a neighborhood school ... kids don't take as much pride in the building. We used to have a big rivalry with a Catholic school not far from here, but now our rival should probably be Martin Luther King High School.

Norton High School, a low sprawling building ringed by a large campus, sits distanced from the duplex homes of its white working class neighborhood. The first Philadelphia high school built after World War II, the structure reflects the roots of its California designer more than those of the community. A handful of white students cluster at the side entrances stealing a smoke before classes. African-American students walk from nearby public transportation stops. Some have travelled for more than an hour, making three transfers. Inside, the school is a maze with long corridors and ramps. The front entrance is lined with glass archives reflective of Norton at its "height" in 1972 when 4,400 middle class students attended the neighborhood high school, only a handful of whom were African American. Today, of the 2,400 students, about half are White, 45 percent African American, and about 5 percent are Asian American. Characterized by some as "a school with an inferiority complex," Norton has lost students to two other comprehensive high schools in the Northeast, to the parochial schools, and to the magnet schools that "siphon off the best from the neighborhood."

These shifts and the accompanying tensions were evident in a public engagement meeting for the Norton cluster in February, 1995.

> The community has a bad impression of Norton. People don't want to send their kids to school with kids from the projects. (Parent)

"Our boy is hard to motivate. He's not meeting his potential."

> The neighborhood has to be more accepting of all students. Neighbors have to get over prejudice. (Parent)

> My family was the only house on the block who sent their kids to public school. We need better public relations. We have to get out what we're doing. There are some successes here. (Parent)

In a focus group interview, parents expressed pride in Norton:

> I'm an advocate for public schools. Parochial schools don't deal with things like disabilities. The exposure my daughter gets here to all different kinds of people is great. It gets her ready for the real world. She's in classes with the deaf and is learning how to sign. She's also working on a project to feed homeless and that's important.

But they also raised concerns: no textbooks in several courses, the difficulty in connecting to a counselor, their children's reluctance to get involved in extra-curricular activities, and school staff's indifference to this lack of involvement. But most of all, parents, like their children are concerned about standards and expectations. Are their children getting a quality education?

> Our boy is hard to motivate. He's not meeting his potential. He's not any kind of problem to his teachers, so they just aren't on him enough to get a fire lighted. But we're getting involved with the school and we think that will make a difference. They did put him on probation for the football team because of his grades and that's good.

> John is a good student. He never brings home homework, but he gets all As. He says he gets stuff done in school. Seems like he could be doing more.

Governance

Like other schools in the study, Norton lost a long-time principal when he retired at the beginning of the current wave of reform. In addition to establishing the first two Academies, he had convened voluntary meetings for several years in the late 1980's that laid the groundwork for some changes: "[The meetings] were part of the whole quality circle thing. We talked about better ways of doing things, different approaches, teaching and learning styles." Two acting principals took up school-based management and shared decision-making.

"People here felt that Governance Council would be a closed ring, just more chiefs."

> I expanded the Cabinet by adding charter coordinators and some other folks.

> I was very in favor of school-based management and was disappointed when the school did not vote in favor of it. Our faculty was reluctant to have a group of people who could seek the favor of the principal. They were afraid they would be self-serving. People wanted to deal with the principal on their own rather than a Governance Council. But even without official school-based management, you can have shared decision-making. We have a cooperative Building Committee [PFT leadership team] and a strong cabinet so we have shared decision-making.

> People here felt that a Governance Council would be a closed ring, just more chiefs.

Currently, the cabinet of about 25 people advises the principal, leaving administrative prerogative in place.

> Things have opened up to more people. The principal is open to all kinds of ideas. She discusses more at Cabinet and it's an expanded Cabinet. There are some problems. We need team building.

> The Cabinet is not empowered. It deals with petty things. We've wanted to do some things in our charter, like an early dismissal for professional development, that have been knocked down there. I don't think Cabinet has the interests of charters in mind. How are we really going to become something if we can't make some decisions for ourselves?

When we introduced this study at a Cabinet meeting and asked staff what they would be interested in learning about Norton's restructuring efforts, their questions pointed to long-standing concerns about equity for students and relationships among faculty. They wanted to know how students "wind up in the charters that they do" and what that means. They wondered how "kids see their choices" and several asked "Does everybody really have a choice?" "How do teachers see their SLCs?" The principal explained that SLCs have "forced a kind of peer review process" when teachers request SLCs and SLCs size up applicants. She wondered how that was "sitting with folks." Staff also wanted to know if services and resources were being "delivered equally" throughout SLCs. Finally, some wanted a core curriculum and common standards *across* SLCs.

"It's a working class school with college aspirations."

Small Learning Communities

Few Norton staff marked the beginning of restructuring with the establishment of the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative, home-grown charters, or the district's school-based management initiative. Instead, teachers and administrators pointed to the formation of the Ecology and Farm Academies in the early 1980's. These programs, originally viewed as career preparation for students who were not going on to college, today attract college-bound students. As one teacher explained: "It's a working class school with college aspirations, which is evident

in our program. The students in our charter are kept in the academic track, even though it's a technical field."

Home-grown charters appealed to some Norton staff who were anxious to try their hand at creating programs for students not served by the two existing academies. And there were other reasons to restructure:

> It was important for us to charterize in order to keep the neighborhood kids so that they don't all end up in magnets [special admission high schools like Central, Girls, Science and Engineering].

The first charter under Collaborative restructuring was University Connection, a Professional Skills Development School that would be a site for both preparing pre-service teachers and seeding innovative and rigorous interdisciplinary curriculum aimed at the college-bound. Urban Studies became the Service Learning Charter and opened its doors in 1991-92 to ninth graders "with some potential, who for reasons of poor attendance or some other factor, were just not doing what they might."

In 1992-93, two new charters, Enterprise and Technical, were created. As the last SLCs on line, they had Norton's "left-over" students, a large proportion of whom were special education:

> The school needs to find a way to share with charters who have come in last. We need a core of stability to take this program somewhere.
>
> Ecology, University Connection are great, but some of the rest of us are really floundering and need help.

The perception is that Norton maintains a vocational/academic segregation.

Norton has not block rostered students by SLC nor has it delineated SLC space. But students in "like tracks" take courses together and mostly travel through the same parts of the building. For example, students in the Academies and University Connection share classes in the higher level math, science and foreign language offerings. Service Learning offers students a college preparatory roster. Enterprise and Technical are adding academically oriented courses, but the perception among students, parents, and faculty is that Norton maintains a vocational/academic segregation that will be difficult to change.

Focus Group Interview

Student 1: Is it true next year lunches will be in charters?

Student 2: I hope not. It will be gang warfare. Plus you won't be able to see other people at all.

Researcher: What do you mean?

Student 2: There's a lot of competition between University Connection and the Academies. They resented that the Academy students got extra points [toward GPA]. But we should. Our courses are a lot harder and we have eight periods.

Student 1: We don't see Enterprise or Technical—some times in the halls. We don't know them. They don't take the kinds of courses we do.

I have the concern that each of our SLCs provides basics for a post-secondary education, but still the perception in the community is that old vocational ed/academic split is going on. We're trying to work to change that perception in the cluster, but it's a long process to get that message across. We need time to bring counselors from the middle schools in to talk about our program and for them to see it.

"Student choice" is used both to challenge and to protect tracking.

In conversations about tracking, "student choice" justifies both change and the status quo. For example, a Technical teacher worried that his students don't have access to the kind of quality writing instruction that he wants for them and that they don't "get to choose a course from University Connection that is good at teaching writing. And we're going to be offering a desktop publishing course next year that would be great for University Connection kids, but they'll never let them come over to us and take it."

From a Researcher's Fieldnotes

Meeting in which central office administrators review and discuss Norton's School Improvement Plan with the school cabinet-

Central office administrator: Data needs to drive what you're doing. I'm looking at your ninth graders who are losing 1,000 days due to suspension. And then I also look at these ninth graders in the SLCs and compare SLCs around suspensions and passing rates and special ed populations

and it looks like there's tracking going on here. Is it?

Vice principal: We're looking at a process of self-selection. Kids self-selecting their courses, not tracking.

Teacher: University Connection has a rigorous program and it's going to appeal to a type of student. We don't exclude any kid who wants to come.

Central office administrator: Your course offerings in all of your small learning communities are on target. But it looks to me like the whole school needs to think about how it's going to support Enterprise and Technical where the special ed populations are large. I see you trying to put requirements for post-secondary ed in to Enterprise and that's admirable. What about special education students in University Connection?

Teacher: Few in there now.

Norton has not decentralized special education. Special education teachers are nominally assigned to SLCs, but most often have only an advisory in an SLC. There are efforts to assign more special education students to regular education classes, but special ed teachers worry that their students are not getting the attention that they need. There remains little interaction among regular and special ed teachers.

There is little interaction among regular and special education teachers.

We don't know what's going on outside special ed. No special ed teachers are assigned to any charter.

Special ed could be integrated. We could work side by side with regular teachers, to help them. But again it's numbers. They don't want to hire more special ed teachers. If they hire more, they need one special ed teacher for every 15 kids. But regular ed teachers teach 33 kids.

Special ed students don't get to choose. They tend to be placed by the roster people. Most charters don't come around to our students to do their presentations.

It's very negative. Special ed is lost in charters; kids are lost in the inclusion process. [Regular education teachers] are limited

because they don't know who's special ed. So the students don't get the special attention [they need].

Professional Development

Partnerships with outsiders have been a bulwark in the development of some SLCs. Through partnerships, teachers have attended professional development opportunities ranging from speakers in SLC-related fields to summer placements in agencies; students have served as interns; and, SLCs have received equipment and materials. Ecology has used its Board of Governors to secure visibility, legitimacy, and resources for the program. "We have strong support from industry. Our lab facilities are extremely well equipped." Its tradition of high level science and math offerings attract and hold the college bound. "Our industry leaders know we're doing a good job." One teacher proudly spoke about his consultancies and university teaching experience in the technology field. Students also expressed admiration of faculty's expertise and connections to industry. Another teacher detailed how he translates his knowledge of the work world to what he expects from students:

> The industry pays well; the industry doesn't want flat tires. My door's locked once the bell rings. They knock, everyone knows who's late. I stay on them because I know what they're up against. I tell them constantly what they've got to expect. This is a fast-paced industry. The kids need to know the technology. I keep things moving.

University-school partnerships need to be on-going, custom-tailored, and reciprocal.

University Connection is a Professional Skills Development School, offering student teaching placements and ongoing in-service education. The university-school partners explain that such relationships need to be ongoing, custom-tailored to the setting, and reciprocal. Among the lessons they offered from their work together were the following:

- The role of SLC coordinator includes facilitator of change, taking a leadership role in conceptualizing what teachers need in order to change their practice, and planning for their learning;

- Work with outsiders is important for teachers to gain new knowledge, new perspectives, a sounding board, and reflection on how the work is progressing and bogging down;

- University Connection has used professional development to build community and to reinvent curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

SLC-wide interdisciplinary projects have provided important moments for community celebration and learning in University Connection. Teachers have collectively examined and assessed student work in these projects and, in so doing, have imagined the next steps needed to nurture the student "product" that they aspire to. Such work moves congeniality toward collegial responsibility grounded in serving students. Teachers described what they want and have been able to get from a collegial community that has grown stronger each year.

> I was put in [the SLC]. I started going to meetings, discussions. I like that the charter has a lot of people interested in reform, making positive changes, rather than sitting around and complaining in the cafeteria. We're all aware that we don't want to get stale. We don't want to get stuck in a rut.

> Charters are positive. You can concentrate on coordinating your efforts with other people ... When a student comes late I can say 'Do you mean to tell me that Ms. Lacy doesn't require late slips?' Because I know the other teachers. If you have problems with a student you can send kids to another teacher that they have a relationship with.

> There's group consensus for decision-making ... We had to decide what we were doing for the midterms. Some people generated ideas; others have to wait for others to generate to get their brains thinking.

"We recruited teachers willing to take a chance for the kids."

But community is not easily built across differences of race and class and pedagogical approach.

> There was a lot of dissent, argument, disagreement. We talked through the disagreements, we worked it out. [The process] was facilitated by the coordinators.

> In the beginning it was extremely difficult to recruit teachers to join the charter. Not enough people were willing to put themselves out there with the rest of the staff, because of the jealousy, envy thing. We looked around at what we needed and went after people. People criticize us because we have

more black teachers in this charter. Well, we saw a need and also saw who's willing to take a chance for the kids.

I was originally in [one SLC], but felt really repressed there. When my ideas were different than the charter leaders, I was put in the position of feeling I couldn't share them. Now I'm in [another SLC] and I feel like I'm treated as a professional.

Last year we had a teacher in here who had so many questions about our program, it really began to hold the charter back and the teacher eventually left.

Conclusion

At Norton we have seen an SLC pushing the definition of collegial community beyond congenial relationships to shared learning among adults and shared responsibility for student performance. SLCs are beefing up the course offerings to challenge the split between vocational and academic education. Teacher leadership is bridging transitions as administrators come and go. We have also seen how hard it is to take on dismantling old assumptions about which students and teachers can learn what. Questions salient to Norton's past, present, and future include:

Who is accountable for untracking teachers and students?

What can school, cluster, and the District do to support new SLCs that get more than their share of "leftover" students? What kinds of decisions and directions would help SLCs resolve inequities?

What does a cabinet or Governance Council need in order to be an effective whole-school-minded decision-making body? What do SLCs need from such a body?

When and how will parents' voices and concerns become important to schools' educational planning?

Marathon High School:
Reflection Grounds Dramatic Restructuring

Student Enrollment: 3,053

White 13% Latino 1%
African American 83% Asian American 3%

Students from Low Income Families 77%

Small Learning Communities: 9
6 Home Grown Charters
2 Motivation/Magnet
1 Academy

Governance Group: Leadership Team

Number of Principals in Period 1988-1995: 2

> [The year] has been hectic, chaotic. I'd like to say exciting but I guess I'd have to hedge on that because I think we started out excited, but the problems mounted and it gave way to frustration. Maybe you could label it growing pains because it was so totally brand new and was widespread and encompassing in a building as large as this one. I guess you have to resign yourself to the fact that there will be bugs that have to be worked out ... I think things will probably run a lot smoother in the coming school year. (Charter Coordinator)

"Restructuring made a huge turnaround in one year."

> Overall, this [restructuring] has been successful. There has been a huge turnaround in one year. The ideas have been carried out and the charters are working. People are tired but that's because they have been working hard to make it work ... Staff had to rethink, plan, and implement—all at the same time.
>
> You have to guide the evolutionary nature [of change]. (Principal)

Marathon High School entered restructuring late and dramatically. In 1993, a former teacher at Marathon became principal. He led Marathon into radically

decentralizing many school-wide functions to small learning communities, with the belief that tight boundaries of time, space, and student and teacher assignments is the essential first step to building SLCs that work. In addition, he modeled and supported assessment and reflection across the school and within SLCs by creating forums where people could discuss what was happening and revise both vision and strategy where needed.

Marathon High School is big and clean. It stands three stories in the shape of a mammoth E in a predominantly white working class community. Floors shine and the tan walls, while dull and institutional, hold little graffiti. Computer banners announce the entrances to individual SLCs, each of which is housed in an arm of the E configuration. In January, there was little other wall decoration. By May, SLCs claimed ownership of halls and doorways by hanging signs and posters that reflected their emerging personalities.

In 1994-95, approximately 2,700 students were enrolled, 1,344 attended school in the main building. Three long standing off-site programs, Social Services, Inspiration, and the Enterprise A Magnet, have been perceived as "siphoning off the best students." Enterprise and Inspiration have provided "safe" off-site campuses for neighborhood Euro-American students. Although 81 percent of the total school's population is African American, only 50 percent of the students in Inspiration and the Enterprise Magnet are black; 100 percent of the School for Social Services is black.

All year, teachers in pre-existing programs worried "that our efforts will be dismantled."

In the fall of 1994, Marathon undertook restructuring of its entire main building into six small learning communities. Although the principal and others articulated the principle of heterogeneity within each SLC, the 1994-1995 school year focused on putting SLCs in place in the main building. All year, teachers in pre-existing off-site programs worried "that our efforts will be dismantled." And at a parent meeting in the spring, the principal explained to the racially mixed group that future student assignments to SLCs in the main building and off-site campuses would strive for balance along such dimensions as race, ethnicity, gender, and achievement level. Several parents argued for not tampering with success. Later, he wondered if this would be the issue that would challenge the authority of his and others' restructuring vision. What was in jeopardy?

The previous year, the principal had involved staff in the restructuring design through activities like identifying their "best hopes and worst fears," surveys, and small group discussions. "Best hopes" included "meet[ing] the needs of all students," "defus[ing] tensions by knowing everyone," and helping students to

"become more active learners." "Worst fears" ranged from the concern that restructuring "will be implemented hastily and true goals will be lost" to worry that particular SLCs will "become a dumping ground for a certain group of students" and that "competition will be created." These activities laid a strong foundation for change as teachers worked through concerns. A staff member commented on the principal's leadership style and its fit with the school:

> This is a very old fashioned school ... Now we are beginning to get into the 90's. The principal has a vision. He is Peter the Great in that he has to wipe away superstition and tradition ... This is a province.

Teachers put together proposals for small learning communities and staff selected where they wanted to be, but not everyone got their first choice.

> I wrote a proposal ... [and] I did get the charter I wanted but some of the teachers didn't. Maybe because I wrote a proposal he put me in the charter I wanted.

Teachers estimate that about 60 percent of students ended up in an SLC that they chose. Teachers made efforts to describe the SLCs to aid students in their placement decisions. But as one teacher noted, "The question is, is choice meaningful to kids?" Some students saw their choices as delimited or illusory and questioned the point of theme-focused SLCs that lacked essential resources to carry out the theme.

The principal devolved decision-making and responsibility in dramatic ways.

> Before I was in the honors block. They broke that up. They just disregarded us completely. We have no honors choices now. (Student)

> I came to this charter to get into art (or woodshop, music, chorus) but we don't have those classes. (Student)

> If we're in Fitness, we should get more health equipment so that we could get used to it - the kinds of things that we'd be using in the hospital. (Student)

> We should get a chance to work with our hands. So maybe like, bring in a frog or something to dissect so we could get used to it. (Student)

Later in the year, a coordinator described her SLC's plans to make choice more meaningful:

> It was very difficult at first because time wasn't allowed for interviewing the students. So all we were going on were records without getting to the individual and finding out what their interests were ... [This year] we are interviewing every student, but that presents a problem because we have students who do not attend on a regular basis.

The principal devolved organizational decision-making and responsibility to newly created SLCs in dramatic ways. Functions such as student discipline, rostering, special education, and purchasing materials and supplies were immediately decentralized. Staff who had served the whole school were assigned to SLCs. Deans and department heads became charter co-coordinators. Special education teachers were assigned to SLCs. This strategy stands in sharp contrast to other schools that have continued to locate many of these functions across the whole school. A central office administrator reviewing the School Improvement Plan gave high praise to Marathon staff assembled to present and defend it: "You're the only school who's decentralizing in this way. This is an exceptional plan." An SLC coordinator explained the principal's strategy:

Rostering confusion created dissatisfaction.

> Really, this year has been used to get all the organizational things in place so the wheels move in sync, and the instructional end of it has been sacrificed to some extent which, I understand, will be a priority next year.

Speed and drama were not without costs, especially in the early months of change. In December, everyone—particularly SLC coordinators—was reeling from massive change:

> This is the worst I've seen at Marathon. The rostering wasn't set up correctly. They didn't figure on the number of students. There is a lot of chaos.

> Right now it seems as if the charter has been cut off without supplies. I don't have enough textbooks for any one class ... None of our duplicating equipment is working.

> I think they rushed it [the charters]. They rushed. They should have waited until it was all set up. (Student)

Rostering confusion created dissatisfaction among both teachers and students. Rostering became so problematic that the school moved back to a centralized system with coordinators providing schedules. Students expressed frustration. Seniors sometimes found themselves in SLCs that did not offer the courses that they needed to go to college. It took weeks, sometimes months, to change rosters—when it was possible to change them at all. "The district shorted us on teachers and 200 students we hadn't expected walked through the doors." Some classes were as large as 50 and "leveling took forever."

In December, students and staff talked about discipline problems, fighting and the potential for violence which they felt loomed over the school.

> The downside of the charters is that unless you monitor them very carefully, charters can become gangs and exhibit ganglike behavior and competitiveness can become rivalry. Once we took note of that, then we began to do some thing to defuse it.

The principal took steps to "give people something" while they managed the hard work of change. He instituted hall sweeps; began meeting with problematic students and transferring out those who had repeatedly "not behaved as good citizens." But perhaps most importantly, students were asked to help tackle the problem—setting the precedent that reform is in their hands too. Student council planned a series of school-wide activities to remind people "they all belong to Marathon."

"In charters, you get to know your teachers better."

How will small learning community identities evolve under the single roof of Marathon High School? Reflecting on decentralization, one teacher looked back and then to the future.

> The bad thing that happened [is the] divisions [among SLCs]. We are reorganizing [to be more] like the United States, that is, each charter having its representatives ... We need to establish a relationship between Marathon the school and Marathon the series of charters.

By spring, students and teachers said that the school felt calm. Some seniors, who had earlier voiced the strongest concerns about SLCs, later reflected and gave a positive assessment:

> I think the whole idea is good. At first we were upset, but then we got to like it. (Student)

> In charters, you get to know your teachers better and you make friends. It is more like family. The ninth graders will have a better chance [because they will have been in an SLC for four years.] (Student)

A teacher agreed:

> [The benefit of charters] is with the kids. It's a good point. It used to be that by November you were hoping you'd never see them again. [Now] you get to know them, they get to know you. They feel comfortable and that's a good point.

Professional Development

The principal asked SLCs to explore what community means.

Under Marathon's restructuring plan, SLCs strive to become meaningful sites for teachers' professional development. To support SLC efforts, the principal met with coordinators to share information, problem solve, and plan. He saw these meetings as modeling a process for professional growth and leadership development which coordinators might adopt in their SLCs. He also set whole school priorities which each SLC was left to pursue its own way. For example, he asked that SLCs consider strategies for exploring what community means and how they could nurture it. One SLC took up this charge by conducting a survey of students and teachers and reflecting on the responses.

One new SLC took advantage of partnership to jump start their professional development and SLC coherence. Renaissance was part of PATHS/PRISM's Arts Empower project which funded materials, student trips to cultural events, and an artist-in-residence. The Arts Empower 1994 institute provided precious time in the summer to advance the SLC's community building and thematic planning for the coming year:

> [Arts Empower] has worked well here, I think. We had our theme and we kind of like did variations on this theme of

> totems as a symbol of self, and since each member of the team had his or her own idea, we kind of let them go with it. So one wanted to do drama, and one wanted to do creative writing, and another wanted to do something with art and writing combined. So we kind of kept our theme as the organizing thread and just allowed everyone to do his own thing and that's worked out well.

But other problems challenged SLCs' early steps toward coherent educational programming:

> I have been in a couple of workshops over the last few summers. Great ideas, plans. When you get back to school, a brick wall. We planned a complete unit for [our program]. When we got back I was teaching ... something entirely different.

> I'm not happy here. I feel like a stranger in a strange land. I'm the only one doing the cooperative learning method. [For the kids] it's too loose. They go wild with it. They get the feeling they can talk their way out of projects. They're not used to the freedom or the autonomy.

Without the links to coordinate their teaching, individual efforts flounder. This comment points to how a shared theme alone may not connect educational programs. Teachers need opportunities to share ideas about broad educational approaches as well as individual classroom strategies.

"My great fear is that my special education students will fall between the cracks."

The Media Academy used its ten hours collectively for team building and to explore the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Three teachers were Fellows at the Re:Learning summer lab school. Teachers active in such networks as Philadelphia Writing Project and Interactive Math Project work together on constructivist, student-centered pedagogy. One described a series of professional development session she has been leading with a Coalition colleague:

> [We] revisited a list [of goals and planned strategies] we did in June, 1994, on all the things we wanted to do ... We talked about which things we have done and haven't done. Why and why not and what things should we put on the list for next year. It went really well -a lot of reflection and a lot of conversation.

A second off-site SLC, Social Services, has also been pursuing the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools for several years and this year organized some curriculum units around essential questions and has undertaken alternative assessment projects across the SLC.

Teachers' concerns about students surfaced prominently in discussions about special education and how SLCs would develop programming that "included" special education students. Not surprisingly, most special education teachers worry about their students and themselves:

> Our kids are petrified. They talk a good game, but my great fear is that they will fall between the cracks ...
>
> I'll be honest with you. We're all concerned about our positions. My job may be in jeopardy. They may eliminate special ed.

A range of strategies for meeting the needs of special education students is emerging. For example, Renaissance has mainstreamed 7 of its 45 special education students. A coordinator's reflections about special education demonstrates how decentralization at Marathon is engaging teachers in thinking through tough dilemmas so that they can meet the needs of *all* of their students.

> We don't have inclusion this year. The special ed kids are with regular during phys ed, lunch, advisory, and charter activities like trips. Next year I'm still not sure how it's going to play out. Special ed teachers will teach one non-special ed class, open to regular and special ed kids. If special ed won't do that, we will lose 20% of our special ed teachers. One possibility is to have a lot of students rostered to more regular classes with a resource room in the roster.
>
> Another possibility is to have a special ed teacher in a regular classroom. It's not the one I like. I don't want another person messing around with my class. And the three special ed teachers here are not science-oriented. How will they help in a science class unless they participate in really intensive professional development?

And in an SLC that pushed forward with inclusion this year, teachers reflected on the trade-offs:

> With most it's going well. They need more direct attention. Sometimes you forget they're there. As long as they get that extra bit of attention, they're great.

> There are a couple you don't have a chance to get back to, that you don't have the extra time for. And the special ed teacher who's not here [on maternity leave] makes a lack of support right now. In the tenth grade one group didn't get Spanish. We were told that they were not bright enough but that was not true. Now everything's identical. We don't have any tracking at all.

Conclusion

An SLC coordinator considered the year and reminded us this about reform:

> This is just very very hard. It's a new system for the teachers, it's a new system for the students ... You just don't have past practice to go on. Every day is a new day.

These schools' stories show ... how Philadelphia education reformers struggle to push school restructuring forward in harsh conditions.

At Marathon, we see the impact of: pre-existing off-site programs; an energetic principal with a vision for the school, a feel for change as a process, and a commitment to developing teacher leadership; the decision to institute dramatic changes in school structures in one year; and the importance of partnerships with outsiders as supports for the development of SLCs.

Marathon's "radical" decentralization made for rough spots in the first year but has also offered the opportunity for SLC teachers to plan their own professional development. Researchers at Marathon were impressed with the staff's ability to reflect on change so early in the process. Continued practice in reviewing and revising their change efforts and increased efforts to bring students into active roles point to possibilities for deepening change. Marathon also raises many questions including:

What are some next steps for Marathon that would push through to changing the culture of teaching and learning?

How can parents, students, and teachers invested in special programs—whether off-site "safe" campuses, magnets for the academically strong—be engaged in assessing and reforming them?

How might the District offer leadership, policy and resources that would support Marathon as it takes on detracking and desegregating special programs and constructing new roles for special education teachers?

Schools in the Midst of Change

Philadelphia high schools sit at a critical juncture in a city that has lost jobs, tax-base, and federal and state funding and where neighborhoods continue to deteriorate from the increase in violent crime. These schools' stories show how hard reform work is and how Philadelphia education reformers struggle to push school restructuring forward in the harsh conditions of scarce resources, an unwieldy bureaucracy, and entrenched adversarial relationships.

Change is not linear, and too often, barriers feel overwhelming and movement impossible.

Our research in these five schools supports Glickman's idea that reforming education calls for learning how to manage the complex predicaments that arise from restructuring as policies, programs, and people sometimes work in concert, but often bump up against each other. The school stories provide those inside and outside schools with a cross-site perspective on what is happening so that they can see and reflect upon dilemmas of reform. How are schools similarly and variously encountering and negotiating such dilemmas as autonomy and interdependence among SLCs, informed choice for students and teachers as they select into SLCs, and strengthening new SLCs that often end up with fewer resources and "leftover" students?

The five case studies, taken together, provide a sketch of what the big picture of reform looks like over time in five buildings. Stories from inside schools are complicated and these case studies are highly simplified and selective, but they offer a history, a starting point for reflection. Change is not linear, and too often, barriers feel overwhelming and movement impossible. But in fact, reform has moved ahead. The case studies show how and where the monumental efforts

of many teachers have pushed reform forward. We see small learning communities beginning to cohere and to offer new incentives for students and teachers to invest in schools. They also show how, too often, all of the requirements for change have been inconsistently present and the many conflicting factors that continue to impede the process. In Chapter IV we outline these achievements of and impediments to reform.

Major reform initiatives must reinforce one another.

CHAPTER IV:

REFLECTING ON REFORM

Building strong, coherent SLCs and revitalizing and redirecting student and teacher dynamics are major long-term processes. They require consensus about the need for change, reasons to invest in the work of change, supports, and rewards for making change, and reflection and renewal for further change. Change needs broad-based and continuous participants, effective structures, processes, and resources. Inadequate supports and resources make reform inadequate. School insiders need constant support to deepen change. Those outside schools need to negotiate policies which offer vision *and* make sense with in-school realities.

Major reform initiatives must reinforce one another. In a previous article based on an ethnographic study of the first three years of "home-grown" charters, we identified three tasks that educators, students, and parents must engage in continuously and simultaneously in order to sustain educational change (Christman, Cohen, and Macpherson, 1996). These tasks are building community, transforming teaching and learning, and reflecting on and revising reform. They provide a lens for understanding how the reform initiatives of decentralization, shared governance, and professional development need to interact and reinforce one another in order to produce strong educational programs and student products.

For students, good teaching involves good relationships dedicated to meaningful work.

Building community includes developing relationships and agreed-upon goals among previously separated groups, sometimes strangers or antagonists to one another. Students and parents are to join teachers and administrators in designing, evaluating, and revising programs. Teachers are to collaborate on program development, as administrators offer support and facilitation, in a less hierarchical, more cooperative system. The task of building community requires broadening participation in all sorts of ways. It also requires decentralizing decision-making in key areas so new and old players have necessary opportunity and payoff for participating. Designing professional development that builds community among staff is an obvious goal. Building new relations among students, teachers, and parents and with outside partners is a less obvious, but even more crucial task, for professional development to tackle.

Transforming teaching and learning is supported by many kinds of professional development. Decentralization is also necessary as teachers themselves must decide on and invest in the changes they seek for their own classrooms. Further, broadening participation in transforming teaching and learning means getting students involved. Outside partners (like the Coalition of Essential Schools, Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity, Philadelphia Writing Project) are critical to this task as they bring fresh perspectives and direct attention to disregarded, but significant, issues such as race, class, and gender, and the importance of guiding educational principles.

Reflecting on and revising reform are foundational to each stage of reform history. Reform must continually listen to and address the school's constituents and history of change. "Old-timers" need to review the plans and outcomes of their design. "Newcomers" need to learn the history and participate in the development of new plans. Research about reform and decision-making helps build new community and revitalize old. Reflecting on and revising reform obviously requires a broadening of participation so that everyone's input is invited and heard. Decentralizing decision-making elicits more active and widespread discussion about change. And at its best, SLC-based professional development is always generating reflection and revision of reform plans, whether it is designing and assessing staff goals for student supports, or reflecting on a teacher's feedback from students about what they learned from a particular project.

Partnerships with outsiders often help build the integration of SLCs.

The following findings focus on the adequacy of structures and processes for change. They are accompanied by recommendations for addressing inadequacies and building upon success, and offer concrete images of how reform initiatives must support one another at the school level.

Student-Centered Reform

> When you know a particular child, you can teach him. (Teacher, New Hill High School)

> Legislative and policy reforms may be necessary conditions for effective change, but they are not sufficient. Implementation of change is dependent upon the extent to which educators, both collectively and individually, redefine their roles with respect to minority students and communities. (Jim Cummins, *Empowering Minority Students: A Framework for Intervention)*

> Teaching is mostly listening, learning is mostly telling.
> (Deborah Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas)*

Students invest in school when: their teachers know, respect, and listen to them; they feel part of a community of learners; they identify what they do in school as necessary and meaningful for their present and future; and they understand and respect the standards used for assessment. For students, good teaching involves good relationships dedicated to meaningful work. Changing student-teacher interactions is at the heart of reforming schools.

In Philadelphia, too many students remain uninvested in their education because it has continued to be extremely difficult for SLCs *to begin to function as communities:* to transform student/teacher relationships and develop coherent curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. But some things are working and ought to be expanded. Strategies that have put students at the center of reform include:

- *Constructivist teaching and learning that builds on students' experience and interests.* Students learn from situations in which they solve problems with teachers guiding their explorations. Such teaching and learning invites students into investigating subject area concepts as we saw in Dan Holman's math class and questions important to them as Julia Keaton's students were doing in their Circle of Knowledge.

"What makes SLCs successful is true autonomy."

- *Community-wide, multi-disciplinary projects that involve teachers in collaboratively planning student activities and students in working toward concrete products.* These projects jump-start coherent curriculum, instruction, and assessment tied to SLC focus. They generate shared language about teaching and learning. They build community by generating enthusiasm and pride among teachers and students. They also generate feedback to the SLC community (students and teachers) about how SLCs are meeting their goals for student learning by grounding discussions of performance standards in actual student work and teacher practice.

- *Teachers systematically building knowledge about students' experience at school, at home, and in the community.* Teacher research projects on student experience, "descriptive reviews" of students, professional development activities offered through S.E.E.D., Family Group, the Seminar on Teaching and Learning, provide teachers entry-points for conceptualizing and enacting curriculum that builds on student knowledge and understand-

ing. They also help SLCs plan how to cluster student supports to address the "whole" student.

- *Partnerships with outsiders (e.g. industry, universities, community agencies) that catalyze and support substantive SLC focus and identity through innovative curriculum projects.* These partnerships require enormous amounts of follow-through at a time when SLCs are inventing themselves from the ground up. But they are worth the effort, often building the identity, strength, and integration of SLCs. Schools, clusters, and the larger District have a role to play in assisting SLCs develop partnerships.

- *Student support activities such as Family Group, Peer Mediation and Peer Mentoring that encourage lively discussion and produce articulate and thoughtful students.* They are catalysts for community building in SLCs. They offer roles for students to engage actively in their education. They are also important sites for teachers to learn more about who their students are.

- *Adults mentoring students.* SLC Coordinators can be powerful supporters for students. SLCs also offer small intimate settings for other committed adults (parents, NTAs, social workers, counselors) with talent for dealing with adolescents to serve as mediators, cheerleaders, and coordinators of supports for students.

Decentralization efforts need to clarify and connect authority, responsibility, and accountability.

Small Learning Communities

There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication.
(John Dewey, *Democracy and Education)*

When you look at what makes small learning communities successful in other cities, it's the fact that they have true autonomy. That means they control their budget. To a degree, they control personnel. To a degree, they control program. We don't give that to people in Philadelphia. And in my view, until we change those rules, we will never derive from small learning communities the full dynamic that can be realized.
(Principal)

Small learning communities *are the structure* that fosters a growing sense of commitment, connection, and involvement among teachers and students. Over time, in SLCs that have sufficient boundaries of roster, space, and shared students, teachers have developed shared responsibility both for building programs and for developing relationships through which students invest in their learning.

But SLCs' impact on students remains preliminary because currently, conditions for community are inadequate. Decentralization has been uneven and unclear; moving decisions, resources, and student supports to SLCs has required massive changes that have received incomplete and inconsistent support. Half-done and half-hearted changes have undermined morale. Key decisions are still made elsewhere for SLCs' staff and student assignments, allocation of resources like supplies, support services, food services, discipline, roster, and bell schedule. People feel embittered and distrustful because of inequities and lack of clarity about where decisions get made. This confusion undermines "community" as school staff struggle to learn constructive decision-making processes.

When decentralization is only half effective, so are SLCs. For example, in many instances, SLC staff have participated intensively in development over the summer—reading, writing, talking with colleagues and sometimes working with students—and return to the school year with rejuvenated vision and energy. But too often, they re-enter situations which do not lend themselves to new instructional approaches and sustaining new relationships. School rosters don't work for teaming SLC teachers and students in interdisciplinary courses. Shared planning time is the first to disappear when other priorities dominate. SLCs don't control decisions about materials that support new instructional approaches.

Reward structures for faculty set the parameters around real change.

The District's mandate that all students be assigned to SLCs by September 1995, the creation of a monitoring system for their implementation, and SLCs' inclusion as an important element in *Children Achieving* have sent the message to schools that small learning communities are not "going away." However, they have not relieved schools and SLCs of the hard work of simultaneously restructuring *and* building community. Decentralization efforts need to clarify and connect authority, responsibility, and accountability. In order for decentralization to move forward, parameters around decision-making authority at each level (district, cluster, school, small learning community) of the system need to be clear. Central office must resist the temptation toward re-centralization and must send consistent messages about devolution. Administration and the PFT need to be in agreement about the goals of decentralization and specific strategies. Together they need to develop a clear statement of boundaries and responsibilities

for the various levels of District, cluster, school, and small learning community. The statement should be easily understood and widely disseminated and address the following areas: governance, budget, personnel, curriculum/instruction/assessment, facilities and services, and accountability. Without such a policy road map, trust will not be built.

Basic ingredients for SLCs include:

1. *SLCs need their fair share of resources and ought to be able to make decisions about how those resources are to be used.* Equity in the distribution of resources and incentives is the hottest issue inside schools. Staff wage high stakes combat over too few resources; hence top-tracked students become the most powerful reward available. School people and policy makers outside schools need to discuss how old policies have built reward structures and to negotiate what needs to be dismantled and redistributed. These resources and incentives include teacher course assignments, space, student assignments, materials, planning and professional development time, and extra-curricular time. Coherent reform vision and policy that address restructuring dilemmas inside schools is vital at this point. District and union leadership must be accountable for changing policies that determine these reward structures for faculty that set the parameters around real change.

2. *SLCs need to develop an educational approach that considers students' needs and interests and teachers' pedagogical stance, not only a theme or occupational focus.* SLC planning requires that teachers cross boundaries to discover who their students really are and that students speak to adults clearly about what they want and need from school. It also requires that SLC teachers examine their practice with one another in light of what students want and need.

Teachers must be accountable to SLCs for continuing their professional growth.

3. *SLCs need to become important sites for teachers' professional growth, so that collectively reflecting upon, changing, and refining practice are the central work of the SLC.* Where SLC teachers consistently, explicitly and collectively explore guiding educational philosophy as well as discrete strategies, they already reap the rewards of student engagement as "The Five School Study" shows. Professional development that is SLC-based works to build and strengthen the SLC's identity and community and connect classes with SLC focus. The goal is professional development that occurs in teachers' daily conversations and classroom consultations about shared students.

As we saw in the case studies, many SLCs still struggle to secure sufficient boundaries of roster, space, and especially, teacher and student assignment. When decentralization is only half effective, professional development loses opportunity for SLC-building. Necessary conditions for SLC-based professional development include:

- *Budget and structural boundaries* sufficient and safe enough for SLCs to know that their decisions about professional development will be implemented;
- *Structural changes* that will facilitate and support professional development efforts: shared planning time, flexible rostering (e.g. extended double periods), teacher assignments, and time for SLC meetings and retreats, and teacher network seminars, that pay attention to the SLC unit;
- *Collective planning for* how to participate in professional development;
- *A critical mass of teachers* participating in the professional development effort;
- *Teachers sharing* with others what they have learned;
- *Resources* to support teachers as they try out new practices;
- *Collective reflection* on professional development efforts and how they have supported what the SLC is trying to accomplish with students;
- *Teacher accountability* to SLC community (colleagues, parents and students) for continuing their professional growth and changing their practice where appropriate.

SLC-based professional development may occur inside the SLC at meetings, retreats, but also "outside" the SLC at teacher network sites. Participation in these "outside" efforts must be explicitly linked to the SLC.

4. SLCs also need information about how their efforts are working in order to make informed decisions so that they can continuously improve. Just locating decision-making at the level of SLCs does not ensure that good decisions will be made. SLCs need information about: student performance; students' and parents' perceptions and satisfaction; what teachers are doing in their

classrooms; and what resources are available to assist them in their work. The District needs to re-configure its information systems so that relevant data is available at the school and SLC level.

Shared Governance

> When one "we" gets to determine standards for all "wes," then some "wes" are in trouble!
> (Lisa Delpit, *Other People's Children)*

> Power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter.
> (Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life)*

A goal of Philadelphia high school restructuring is to make schools more democratic institutions. Student-centered reform requires that students, along with their parents, teachers, and principals, be involved in developing, implementing, and assessing educational program. In order for reform to take hold, new relationships characterized by trust and respect must be built inside old structures and histories.

Such relationships, the foundations for the communication and consensus necessary for reform to proceed, have been very difficult to build within and across all levels of the school district. Tensions among the District, the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers reflect their lack of agreement about essential elements of the reform agenda. This political climate makes risk-taking at the school level too often not worth the effort.

Parents and students are largely absent in the discourses about change.

In Philadelphia, as elsewhere, governance councils alone have proved to be an inadequate strategy for democratizing schools. School councils asked much of people inexperienced in governing, discussing and deliberating across constituencies.

People on interim councils during the first years of the Collaborative valued conversations about restructuring for their fervor and intellectual engagement. These discussions were originally supported by organizational development consultants and facilitators provided by the Collaborative. But councils encountered frustration when confronted with the task of moving dialogue out into the broader school community. School staff were critical of councils and unclear about their power. When teachers stepped forward to participate on councils

or when they were selected by administrators to do so, their non-participating colleagues often questioned the legitimacy and authority of the group's work, pointing out that their own perspectives were missing, that there was neither broad based buy-in nor mandate for the reform plan. "Input" without decision-making was viewed as fruitless and disengagement resulted. Clarity about the terms of participation is crucial for engagement. What does it mean to be represented by a Governance Council?

Although some schools now have school-wide leadership groups (in the form of cabinets and leadership teams), school administrators have maintained authority and responsibility for setting the agenda of issues/questions/decisions on the table for consideration. Where there have been choice and sufficient time and opportunity for teachers to develop SLC allegiance and identity, staff have begun to empower SLC coordinators to represent them in whole school leadership groups and to negotiate resources so that SLCs can implement their programs as they decide. Where such conditions do not exist, staff have continued to feel alienated and under-represented in school decision-making. But this kind of representative governance has shortcomings. SLC interests in competition do not create whole-school vision and guiding educational principles.

There continues to be little parent involvement in planning and decision-making. Few parents appear in schools. Parents are usually so under-represented and under-informed as to feel inconsequential or unentitled to participate in decision-making. There has also been little dialogue with students about what school ought to be. They might be discussed as the beneficiaries of reform, but not as active shapers of educational direction. They are largely absent in the discourses about change.

Over and over again, good conversation was absent, abbreviated, or silenced.

School reformers need to consider honestly the question: Are we willing to involve all constituencies (teachers, administrators, parents, students, community) in reform efforts from the beginning—not after they have been conceived and/or implemented? If such commitment does not exist and is not enacted early when there are important decisions to be made, it is likely that all groups will never own reform and that the District/cluster/school/SLC is not ready to proceed with substantive change. Under these conditions, the hard questions of accountability to students and parents are avoided. If there is a commitment to have multiple stakeholders involved in reform, the next consideration is: What kinds of support are needed to put them on an equal footing for the work?

Strategies for broadening participation include:

1. *There must be many avenues for involvement in developing, implementing, and assessing the educational vision.* Everyone needs to learn how to participate and many more need to take the chance. Committees, networks, planning teams, study groups all offer forums for people to learn how to deliberate and decide. The PFT ought to encourage such participation.

2. *In order for reform to be student-centered, parents and students must be involved in developing, implementing, and assessing educational program.* Discussions are different when parents and students are present. For example, the centerpiece of *Children Achieving* is student performance standards. What processes invite all students to learn about the teaching and learning issues that are the foundation for "standards"? How will students be invited to invest in these standards? What role could teachers plan for students to learn about standards?

3. *Principals must generate critical support for the reform vision; they must create sufficient safety and respect in schools to encourage evolving SLCs' explorations of autonomy, and they must also mediate SLC interdependence.* This includes creating forums for SLCs vying for inadequate resources. Administrators must lead the engagement of the entire school community in developing the "campus of SLCs" around a shared educational vision.

4. *Leaders need to create contexts and processes for multiple constituencies to participate in reform.* This study's findings point to the efficacy of administrative/teacher leadership that promotes and presses the reform vision, at the same time devolving authority and leadership to others. Over and over again, we observed meetings (and classrooms) where good conversation—the foundation for learning and change—was absent, abbreviated, or silenced. All players (including parents and students) need leadership skills that emphasize facilitation and mediation, question-posing, listening, and reflection. These abilities must become a priority for everyone's learning.

Good long-term professional development challenges teachers to reconsider their relationships with students and with knowledge.

Adults Learning

> We will change American education only insofar as we make all schools educationally inspiring and intellectually challenging for teachers. The school itself must be intellectually stimu-

> lating, organized to make it hard for teachers to remain unthoughtful. (Deborah Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas*)

More teachers need access to good, long-term professional development. In classrooms where we observed students actively engaged and where they said that they were learning, teachers reported multiple involvements over time in the kinds of intensive professional development that challenged them to reconsider their relationships with students and with knowledge. They pointed to settings like Collaborative summer institutes, the Philadelphia Writing Project, Interactive Math Project, the Coalition of Essential Schools, and Re:Learning. Through participation in such long-term, intensive efforts, teachers learn how to "catch the ball" when other professional development opportunities arise and when their SLCs and schools take on new initiatives. They spot how such initiatives contribute to and build upon their evolving pedagogy. They can then lead much-needed discussions about educational philosophy and guiding principles so that SLCs can articulate a shared educational vision.

Guiding principles for professional development ought to include:

1. *Professional development ought to attend simultaneously to curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and relationships with students.* Those involved in designing and implementing professional development must consider how their efforts connect across these areas and make connections explicit. For example, *Children Achieving's* implementation of standards for student performance offer opportunities for professional development to link assessment with curriculum and pedagogy. However, standards must not be an abstract overlay. Realities of current classroom practice and student work need to ground teachers' and parents' discussion of standards.

Teachers rarely look back to see and value how far they've come.

2. *Professional development needs to build community as well as change practice.* Teachers, parents and administrators ought to participate in professional development activities together. Learning together puts stakeholders on an equal footing; it builds community. It also builds investment in reform strategies—curriculum innovations, student support activities.

3. *Administrators, like teachers, need access to good, long-term professional development.* Although shared decision-making and decentralization into SLCs demand a newly envisioned role for principals, there have been few forums for principals to re-think their practice either with other building administrators or with their staff and community members.

Reflecting on Reform: Putting Research into Action

> "One knows the world by seeking to change it."
> (Sartre, as quoted in Hess, 1992)

Successful revision of reform plans requires that participants assess implementation and results in an ongoing way. Such reflection is essential to deepening reform and to ensuring that it is serving all students well. Decentralization and shared decision-making assume that SLCs research how they are progressing and reflect about what they are learning. SLCs must also have the capacity and authority to make and enact decisions based on their assessments.

Critical reflection has been very hard to establish in schools, perhaps because it is the most threatening to the status quo and the silences that maintain it. It cannot be assumed that people know how to have discussions about research, deliberate about its meaning and its implications for decision-making. Many of our conversations with school staff in these five schools were permeated by a theme of "fraudulence." People explained how what was going on in their classrooms, SLCs, and schools was far from the perfect, idealized, intended reform. (e.g. Students don't *really* get to choose their charters. Teachers aren't *really* listened to.) Such statements seem partially true *and* unjustly critical to us at the same time. They convey a hopelessness that pervades schools. With scarce resources, time, and energy, people remain inexperienced in reflection. Teachers have had few opportunities to look back, to see how far they've come and what has made the trip hard and joyful, or forward to see the possibilities and predict the pitfalls.

A new era of reform is lacking a shared sense of previous experience.

For example, schools often abandoned councils with no processing of what happened, and no collective consideration of how the strategy for shared governance might have been modified to make it work. There have not been opportunities to process and reflect on the history of SBM/SDM. A new era of reform begins—which again has SBM/SDM as a centerpiece—without the benefit of a shared sense (at either the school or district level) of previous experience.

Ingredients essential for critically reflecting upon and revising reform include:

1. *Leadership must value and model critical discussion about the evolution of reform efforts.* Such collective history and learning is a foundation for future efforts. When principals and other leaders publicly reiterate where the school is

headed and where it began, people can see that reform is very hard, but doable. Everyone must see that he/she has a role to play in revising the reform vision.

2. *Stakeholders need to be involved in planning reform and evaluating how it is working.* School-wide and SLC-based forums need to ask: How are innovations proceeding? What are the snags? Where are the successes and how can they be built upon? Administrators, parents, teachers, and students need information about what is happening in schools: what programs are being implemented, what is going on in classrooms, how various groups perceive change. They need to examine student work as an important source of data about what students know and are able to do.

3. *Outsiders (researchers, consultants, critical friends) can be helpful in providing data and facilitating discussions about feedback.* They can raise questions that are either unsafe for insiders to ask or invisible to insiders because of taken-for-granted assumptions. They can also be an audience/sounding board for insiders' ideas, hypotheses, and planning. Finally, outsiders can interrupt the habituated interactions of insiders, spotting omissions and keeping track of results.

"Research for action" uses discussions of research for further planning.

4. *When parents and students reflect with educators, their perspectives often catalyze deeper change.* Students should be actors in the change process. Teachers and administrators need to know what students think about their education so that they can address their concerns. Students need opportunities to reflect and make meaning so that they can invest in their schooling and responsibly participate in shaping reform. How do we solicit their concerns and listen to them? How do we develop their sense of responsibility for what schools are like?

5. *Collectively examining and assessing student work needs to become common practice in SLCs.* It is the critical link for helping students meet standards for performance. Teachers looking together at student work engage in conversations about expectations for student performance. They strategize about the kinds of instructional strategies, tasks, and feedback to students necessary to achieve desired student product.

Epilogue: Learning from "The Five School Study"

What became apparent in our research process and in feedback meetings with school staff was people's pressing need for research on reform work—the opportunity to reflect on, discuss, and plan from what has been gained. A draft of this "Five School Study" was circulated to the five schools' research teams early in 1996. The first cross-school opportunity for discussions of this "Five School Study" was organized by the Office of Education for Employment at a February 1996 retreat for several school teams to develop restructuring plans. For an hour, a panel of five principals from the five schools discussed their schools' histories and challenges of restructuring. Using the framework of "The Five School Study," the principals analyzed the whole-school factors that made "change for all students' high school experience" so difficult to restructure, re-engage and revitalize. Untracking students proved to be at the center of many ongoing dilemmas. Reading "The Five School Study" had underlined and clarified this for these principals.

The forum used the study as an analytical framework and the panel of principals as interpreters of the research—and yielded a whole new synthesis. The following excerpts of the principals' ideas about untracking offer a model of benefits from reflecting about reform. This is "research for action": use of research documents to further discussion of how reform plays out in schools—in forums with interested audiences who are planning teams themselves.

All students learn best in mixed-level groupings.

The whole-school and cross-school perspective of "The Five School Study" and the principals' panel at the retreat showed that the biggest restructuring dilemmas surround untracking. Before restructuring, all five schools were largely organized by their special programs, which left all the "other" students and teachers with "leftover" status and "failing" or "just getting by" behaviors and results. Homegrown SLCs were designed to address these students.

Selective programs with long histories and many beneficiaries are asked to invite, in the name of equal access, those students with less promising academic records and attitudes. At the same time, new SLCs struggling to invent program and attract students must compete with the considerable powers of "magnet" programs. A principal describes the classic case:

> [The building] had ... two very well established, well recognized academic programs ... one of them with an international reputation ... The Academy put resources into it, and the

> principal put resources into it and the kids came ... They were the magnets in that building that attracted kids from all over the city into it. And the rest of the school felt as if they were ... the dumping ground. These two magnets drew the best kids. They had the highest promotion rate, the highest graduation rate, the lowest dropout rate.

Not only do invested students and parents and teachers fight hard against equal access to these programs, but teachers, this principal asserts, during restructuring are still fighting for the "good" students: "Because nobody wanted the regular comprehensive school kid. Everybody was looking to claim the top." Moreover, "People wanted to go into SLCs because they thought that they could select their kids and get the best"—leaving the leftovers for the latecomers.

This is the story of the comprehensives—and the high dropout rate and low morale of the left-behinds. Reform must significantly improve their high school experience. Many researchers have concluded that students learn best in mixed-level groupings, in small communities, and in programs designed around relevant topics and/or vocational interests. Students succeed when they are literally recognized and thoroughly supported by program and staff. Students fail when they are not known or engaged by the community in its work. The label "leftover" points toward the "dropout" door.

"Kids want to be where the action is."

The segregation of students into tracked programs reinforces the attitude that only some students can achieve—and the "other" students "cannot learn." This attitude then reinforces tracking of students—and teachers—and determines the design and intent of programs.

The race and class assumptions and realities embedded in tracking are rarely articulated, and all the more powerful for this protection by silence. One principal offers a typical case:

> Even though [the school] was 88% African American, you could go to Motivation and find that it might have been 45% white, which showed us that something was terribly wrong with the way kids were getting into and out of programs.

Another principal explained the power of the "can't learn" attitude, and the challenge of changing it:

> You're changing the culture. Or you're challenging a belief system. If people truly believe that kids cannot learn, they demonstrate that in a lot of different ways ... You've changed something that has traditionally been accepted in the school. People know that it's this way. And you come along and you question it as a principal. And you get people talking about it. And you foment change. And faculties [do not then] say, 'We are really supportive of the principal who has made out lives significantly tougher.'

Nothing less is at stake in untracking than "changing the culture or challenging the belief system."

Each of the five schools' principals had strategies to interrupt tracking processes and attitudes: attracting students into newer and older programs; redesigning all programs to address this priority; requiring a core curriculum; using the new standards to monitor both access and outcome for all students; and professional development to address attitudes about teaching and learning.

All principals emphasized the professional development necessary for teachers to develop "a community of purpose" for the school to provide direction for its redesign. For one principal, "it was the reformation of the high school experience for all the kids that had to be the center of all the changes that we were going to do." For another,

"We're learning more about what our kids can do."

> The Philadelphia Schools Collaborative ... really put a good chunk of resources, both human and financial, into those schools that wished to embark on ... charters. ... The message then was, *think about* doing it ... knowing what will be supported through [the] process ...

Principals emphasized the leadership and teamwork necessary to

> ... communicate the vision, to keep the dream alive, to get everybody understanding what the process is going to be, and what counts. And the principal must articulate what counts ... It has to be in every single thing that takes place in the school. It has to be manifested in the way that teachers and staff talk to kids, talk to each other, the curriculum, it must be infused with a vision ... You do it all together, but the principal sets the tone.

Teachers' "connection" to students will develop the teacher attitude that "all kids can learn," one principal believes:

> Another challenge clearly for all of us, is our ability to nurture and motivate people to connect with these kids, and talk to kids ... keeping these kids motivated and talking to them, and making them feel like we really care ...

This principal sees "healthy competition" between SLCs as a key to untracking:

> Because over time, it's really about the kids picking to be in your program because your program is a 'hot effort,' 'hot learning community.' Even now [as] we are embarking on a fourth SLC, we know that all the others will be affected by the joining in of another one. And the question becomes, "Can you hold the people?" Because kids want to be where the action is. And I'm hearing them get excited about new programs. And when I talk to people in other SLCs, the competition piece is key because some people get a little jealous ... you really have to have the best program to keep their interest.

Failing students are not so much "dropped" as *pushed* out.

> And when I look at absenteeism ... and I look at teachers who are really motivated to be together and work in this SLC, and how they come to work because they care about each other, because they're focused on supporting each other in their SLC, all that ties in for me to the challenge of keeping it fresh ... keep [competition] alive in terms of new ideas and getting new students involved. So that they talk about it, spread the word.

> And at the same time, you develop an opportunity to find out what students can do. Because every day, we're learning more and more about what some of our kids can do and how we can add things to our SLC program that meet their needs ...

Success with *new* programs—and with "new students" newly involved—shows "what students can do" and suggests "how we can add things ... that meet their needs." *SLCs comprehensively designed for mixed-level students are "the opportunity to see what students can do."*

Another principal explained a strategy to address "the key tracking issue":

> This year we decided to do this core curriculum where we expect every child ... to take foreign language. We've eliminated general math, and we're really hoping that this whole notion of having high expectations for all kids will lead to kids fulfilling those expectations.

"Course offerings" across SLCs must give "equal access, equal opportunity" for all students. "If you have SLCs that are still offering general math, and not offering liberal academic courses, you're promoting tracking," another principal points out.

> You have to monitor: Are there more resources going into a particular learning community? Are the better teachers going to a particular learning community? ... And again, you look at the [student] outcomes to make sure that they are evenly distributed.

The new standards for student outcomes dramatically raise the stakes for SLCs. Traditionally, the easiest way to improve outcome data is to get rid of the "hardest kids." Teachers and programs that ignore, exclude or run from the "hardest kids" help marginalize them. Michelle Fine argues in *Framing Dropouts* (1991) that the many failing comprehensive high school students are not so much "dropped" as *pushed* out by these unresponsive, even punitive features of their schooling.

As the principals' talk emphasized, only teachers' collective investment in all student outcomes, and collective decision-making to address these equity issues among SLCs, can begin to build the alternative reward system for taking responsibility for these students. What are the rewards and supports and policies for teachers and programs to direct their resources to these students?

Tracking was produced out of a long history of programs, with multiple resources shaping them, many different investments in them, and fundamental educational attitudes guarding them. Untracking is a long complex process to develop a whole new system. The principals emphasized that this vision of long-term change must be understood by everybody involved. At the center is reform's most basic assumption that every child can learn.

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APPENDICES

A. The Philadelphia Schools Collaborative

Goals

The Philadelphia Schools Collaborative is a network of teachers, parents and administrators within and across high schools who are committed to preparing children for thoughtful and active citizenship in a pluralistic, democratic society. The purpose of the Collaborative is to support educators and parents engaged in improving student achievement levels by:

- Enhancing instructional practices,
- Designing authentic assessment measures,
- Developing integrated curriculum,
- Deepening knowledge of the academic disciplines, and
- Exploring school redesign strategies.

The restructuring of high schools in Philadelphia involves two related strategies. The first is the development of **charters**. The second is to assist in the conversion of comprehensive high school buildings into campuses of multiple, autonomous charters. The mission of the Collaborative is to facilitate the work of educators and parents in charters. The PSC supports a variety of initiatives at the school level:

- Developing charters within schools,
- Promoting teachers' professional growth as part of life within charters,
- Exploring models for school restructuring,
- Involving parents and educators in the use of data in the development of charters,
- Devising strategies for the inclusion of labeled students (i.e., at risk, Chapter 1, Special Education) in charters, and
- Integrating the academic and vocational curricula.

The Collaborative works through five school based centers selected as sites for fostering practice.

Activities

The PSC provides services to educators and parents in charters and schools that are at various stages of redesign.

Conversations among Colleagues

- **Charter visitations**

The PSC arranges visits to member schools for administrators, teams of teachers and parents to visit classrooms and charters.

• **Assessment and Accountability**
The PSC charters are exploring and developing a variety of learner centered approaches to student assessment. These include extensive records of teacher observations, collections of student work and portfolios, and exhibitions of student work.

Charter Supports

• **Charter Enrichment**
The PSC has developed collaborations among teachers in charters and university faculty for the purposes of:

- helping **groups of teachers** develop into **teams of charter teachers**,
- deepening teachers' knowledge of their disciplines,
- enriching classroom practices, and
- assisting them to develop interdisciplinary curricula.

• **Institutes**
Every spring, summer and fall, the PSC offers a series of Institutes facilitated by school staff and university consultants who have experience in developing integrated curriculum, team-building, authentic assessment, and innovative instructional practice.

• **Symposia**
The PSC regularly hosts dinner meetings featuring speakers and discussions which explore the issues of school and classroom redesign, restructuring and reform.

• **Computer Network**
The PSC maintains an electronic bulletin board system (BBS) that provides an opportunity for teachers, parents and administrators to exchange ideas and information across the city and the country.

• **Newsletter**
The PSC publishes a newsletter that features the work of educators and parents in charters.

Partners

- Coalition of Essential Schools
- Family Group
- The National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum
- Philadelphia Writing Project
- The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform

Connections with Higher Education

- The University of Pennsylvania
- Temple University
- Community College of Philadelphia
- Wellesley College Center for Research on Women (SEED Project)

Collaborators

Education Commission of the States
National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST)
Philadelphia Federation of Teachers
School District of Philadelphia
Education Law Center
PATHS/PRISM
Parents Union for Public School Education
Philadelphia High School Academies, Inc.

Research in Support of Policy and Practice

• Teacher Inquiry
The PSC encourages and supports ongoing teacher research around classroom practice.

• Charter Ethnographers
A set of ethnographers work closely with charters to document their work.

• Decentralization and Charter Development
The PSC is sponsoring a series of policy oriented research projects tracking decentralization, professional development and charters.

• Equity Issues for Small Schools
The PSC is collaborating in a set of examining questions of equity (gender, race, class, language, disability) inside charters, and other secondary schools throughout the District.

Providing Public Information

The PSC receives numerous requests for information each year from schools, districts, school boards and universities locally and nationally, from foundations and nonprofit organizations, and from elected officials throughout the country. In response to these requests, the PSC has organized the following outreach activities:

- School visits
- Speaking Engagements
- Newsletter
- Professional Development
- Resource Materials
- Media/Press Coverage
- Publications

B. Research Activities

Some Questions You Might Include in Interviews of Teachers/Administrators/Parents

A. School Context
What is this school like? How would you describe it to a friend? What is important to know about the school, its staff, students, parents and community?

B. History of Restructuring
How has restructuring unfolded at your school? What are some of your memories of early conversations about restructuring? What were some pivotal events? What are a couple of important decisions that have been made along the way in your school's restructuring efforts?

What do you believe are some of the key values underlying restructuring? How do you see those values being manifested in what your school is doing? How are they absent in what your school is doing?

How has your school gone about setting up charters? How did you choose themes for the charters? How did/do staff and students join a charter? What did you do about existing programs like motivation and academies?

Who has exercised leadership in restructuring in your school? How? How do you see certain roles like teacher, principal, charter coordinator, roster person, counselor evolving?

What dilemmas has your school encountered in its restructuring efforts? What were the different stands that people have taken around these dilemmas? Where did you sit in this dilemma?

How are decisions made and carried out? What kinds of decisions are now being made in charters/schools within schools? What kinds across charters/schools within schools? Where do you see conflicts/problems?

How would you characterize the communication systems in your school? How and what information gets disseminated among staff/students as a whole? Among and within charters?

What do you think is most different about your school now as compared to five years ago? What do you think is most similar? What is different for kids? What, if anything, have you noticed has had a positive impact on kids (what kinds of kids)? What, if anything a negative impact? What is different for you?

C. Professional Development
What kinds of professional development activities have you been involved in? How did you become involved? How have they influenced your practice?

What kinds of activities have other faculty been involved in? Are there particular kinds of professional activities that the school/your charter has really promoted? How have these influenced your restructuring efforts?

Where would you like to see your school headed in terms of professional development?

Some Questions You Might Include in Focus Group Interviews of Students

We suggest that during the first round of fieldwork researchers conduct two or three student focus groups. You will probably need to investigate what kinds of groups would work best at your school, e.g. will you learn more talking with a group of 6-8 students within a charter? What kind of talk might a cross-charter student group yield? You will want to include students across grades, gender, and race/ethnicity. And again you'll need to check in with your site about how to include students at all levels of achievement, kids labeled "special," and so forth.

If you were talking with a friend who was considering coming to this school, what would you recommend? What should they watch out for? What would you change about the school?

What's good about school for you, and why?

What's not so good, and why?

(Especially for 9th graders or new students) How is this school the same as/different from your middle/old school?

What do you think about charters? About restructuring/reform? How are high schools with charters the same as/different from schools without charters?

Do you think your classes are different because they're in a charter? What else about your school experience might be different because of charters?

What is discipline like in you school/charter? What happens if you need some help for an academic or personal reason—who can students go to, and how does it work?

What's your charter like?

What are other charters in this school like?

How/why did you select your charter? Do you want to stay with it? Why/why not? What would you change about your charter?

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7 Benjamin Franklin Parkway,
Suite 700,
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1294
(215) 665-1400
fax (215) 864-2494